Studies by A Recluse in Cloister Town and Country

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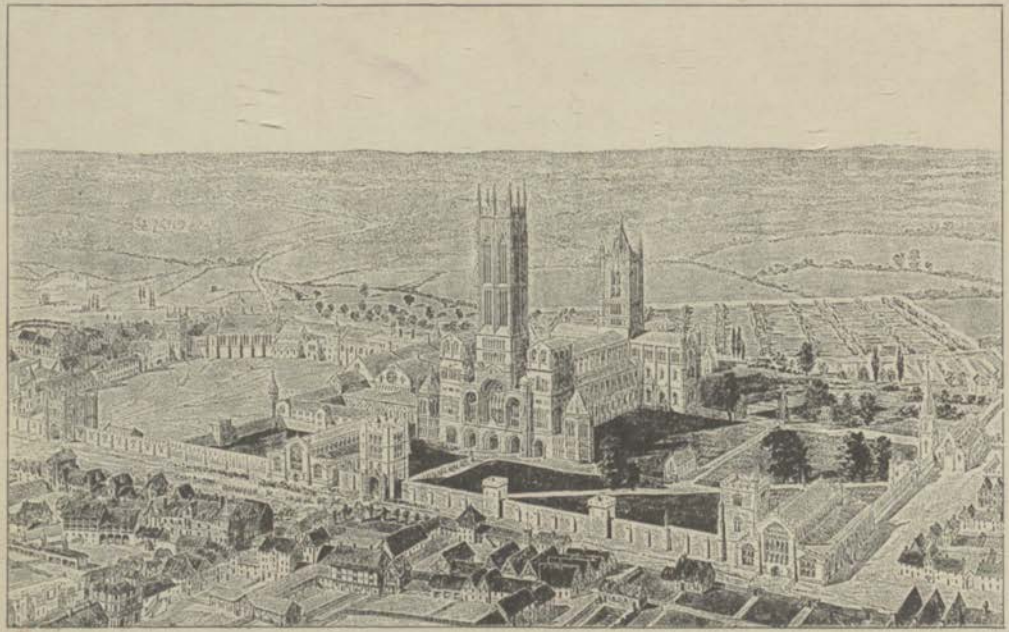

ST. EDMUND'S ABBEY BEFORE THE SUPPRESSION.

STUDIES BY A RECLUSE

In Cloister, Town, and Country

BY

AUGUSTUS JESSOPP, D.D.

Rector of Scarning

98592

"I have considered the days of old,
The years of ancient time."

London
T. FISHER UNWIN
PATERNOSTER SQUARE
MDCCCXCIII

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PREFACE.

THE pursuit of Historical Research is one of those delightful luxuries which only the favoured few can indulge in with any great success. Like other forms of sport, it requires a certain command of money, and more than that, it requires much leisure on the part of its votaries. From Herodotus, downwards, the great historians of the world have, at all times, been men of independent fortune, or at any rate, men whose resources were ample and their incomes large. Clio demands that they who attend her court and hope to win her smiles should be well dressed, well mounted, well housed and far removed above the sordid needs of those who have to earn their bread. Thucydides had his gold mines in Thasos. Polybius, they say, had a Roman fleet at his orders when he chose to sail away for Carthage or Spain. Livy had the run of all the Patrician archives. Tacitus lived in

affluence all his days ; and so it has gone on from age to age. Gregory of Tours, whom men call the father of French History, and Beda, whom we may call the father of our own, could never have known what we understand by "money difficulties" any more than Matthew Paris did with the resources of St. Alban's at his back, or than Gibbon, or Grote, or Hallam, or many another of the great ones of our own time whose balance at their bankers has always been on the right side. When we come to consider it, we see that it could not have been otherwise.

The study of History makes great demands upon the scholar's purse. He must have a large supply of books at his elbow; he must be a traveller, and so must have acquired the trained geographical eye; he must be able to read at least three or four languages; he must be able to wait before he sums up great masses of evidence that cannot help accumulating upon him; he must often investigate minute points by the help of experts who can be trusted and who have to live by their toil; and all this, and much more which original research involves, cannot be done by those who are haunted by "the eternal want of pence" and the anxiety *de lodice paranda.*

But this is not all. The man that hopes to earn the title of Historian must be one whose circumstances allow of his having much time that he may call his

own. For the great teachers are not they who pick up their knowledge at odd moments and who have to trust to occasional half-hours snatched from the business of life, to follow up some faint clue, or to work out some complex problem. They have their object to live for and their vocation is, to prove to their less fortunate fellow creatures the inestimable value of leisure when they to whom it is granted devote their energies to such noble tasks as can never *pay*, and which yet require to be done by the ablest and the wisest.

These things being so, it must be obvious that, in our days, a clergyman with a cure of souls whether in town or country, must give up all hopes of being anything but a smatterer in science and the higher walks of literature. If he attempt to pose as a master he is pretty sure to be set down as a mere pretender by the specialists. A man need not be quite a beggar, he may hang loosely to the income of his benefice, he may even be liberally supplied with the ordinary means and appliances which are essential to independent investigation and research; but he is not an honest man if, having accepted the charge of a parish, he does not regard the duties of his official position as the main duties of his life; and in so far as he is true to them he cannot call his time his own.

It seems to me simply impossible that the "parson

of a town," in the modern acceptation of the word "town," can be a student, and it is increasingly difficult and must become more and more rare to find even a Country Parson who can be a man of real learning and profound research.

As to the townsmen, they make no secret of the matter, they tell us that the claims upon their time—night and day—are all but bewildering; they assure us they have no time for serious reading; they seem disposed to concede that high culture is not expected of them. But my town brethren show a disposition to finish up their expressions of regret at their own shortcomings by a covert sneer at us, their brethren in the country villages, by loftily assuming that we in the wilderness have nothing to do. This ridiculous superstition is a survival of a state of things which has long since passed away.

The fact is that the country parson's time is as much broken into and frittered away as the townsman's is. The difference lies in this, that in the town the clergyman, if he be good for anything, has to work through a small army of subordinates, and the country parson has *no* subordinates, no one to co-operate with him, no one to whom to say, "Go, and he goeth," or "Come, and he cometh." My friend of the streets has district visitors and school teachers and lay helpers and sisters, and a host of other earnest people of both

sexes, and he does his work, and he *must* do it, through and with them. We in the villages must visit every soul in our parishes, manage the school, keep the charities going—beg, borrow or give, as the case may be, and sometimes, like Corporal Trim, we are sorely tempted to steal—for this necessity or that. The ringers and the singers, the sexton and the clerk, the relieving officer and the paupers, the guardians and the workhouse, the naughty old gossips and the saucy boys, all somehow or other contribute to worry the Country Parson.

What a different state of things there was in our grandfathers' days. There were no schools then ; no fussy visiting of the poor; no worrying to put in three services on Sunday, and at least two in the week ; no lecturing in the Mission Room on the common when the snow was falling; no detestable newspapers to disturb the minds of growling grumblers ; above all, no thought of two sermons on Sunday to haunt you with their disappointments of yesterday and the weight of their heavy burden hanging round your neck to-day and to-morrow and the next day, till the hour comes round for their delivery, and the anxious question recurs, "Who will be there to listen?" And yet who of us with any heart and any conscience and any zeal for God or man does not rejoice that we have been delivered from any tolerance

of the old supineness, and who of us would not contemplate a return to the old condition of affairs with shame and dismay?

But the fact remains, that, with all that is expected from town and country parsons nowadays, and in the face of all that the best of them are humbly and prayerfully trying to do for their people and the Church of Christ, it is too much to expect that we should have a *learned* clergy, it is inevitable that culture and anything in the shape of erudition should steadily, and perhaps rapidly, decline among us all. Of course there is an evil to fear in the prospect, and I notice that in the Irish Church they have already begun to feel the seriousness of that evil and to deplore the fact that the clergy in Ireland are tending to become all men of one type, narrow in view, and diminutive in intellectual stature. But I for one am not afraid of the future.

In the providence of God it may well be that His Church shall be built up to more loftiness of endeavour, more lowliness of mind, more intense appreciation of simple goodness, more living faith and devout vigilance by a clergy who are "not of this world," and who may even be the objects of contempt to the sciolists. It may be we need to be reminded that there are better things than writing History or even Theology, and that it was not by

learning that the conquering Cross prevailed, but by the labours of ignorant and foolish men who overcame the world through the sheer force of love and sublime self-sacrifice.

And so when a pert young academic, just fresh from the schools, and rejoicing in his place of honour bravely won, assures me that all the other professions are going up and the clerical profession alone is going down, I do not quail before that exuberant youth or tremble at his glowing eye, but, like the silent parrot, I "think the more"; and a whisper seems to say to my own heart, "Fishermen from Galilee in their Master's strength beat the Philosophers once; they took some time about it, but the rout was complete at last. Strong Son of God! it may be—it may be that Thy Word shall go forth for the weak ones of the world to do the like again!"

—

I have written thus far by way of disclaimer and apology. Three years ago I published a collection of papers which I had the presumption to call Historic Essays,[1] in which some of the critics discovered, as a matter of course, a bad blunder or two, and therefore proceeded to censure me for presumption.

[1] "The Coming of the Friars and Other Historic Essays." 1889.

The fact is that I was still possessed by the old-fashioned notion that the word "essay" meant an *attempt* and nothing more. But the great masters in Historic Literature have lifted the word "essay" to a higher level than heretofore, and it has now attained to the meaning of a *great achievement.* The title of my volume was its condemnation and my own, and convicted me of setting up a claim to take rank among the great historians of our time; when in the very truth I was no historian at all. I have already said that I hold it to be next to impossible for any clergyman in the 19th century who is conscientiously trying to do his duty as a Parish Priest, to be a master and teacher in History, "the most difficult of all the sciences." And yet there are some men in whom a taste for this or that pursuit amounts to a passion. They know—none better—that they cannot hope to attain, but they cannot help aspiring. These are the unfortunate *amateurs* in art or science whom the experts are too much inclined to despise, forgetting that these too are a useful class in their way, and that so far from dreaming of putting themselves in competition with their betters, they are really quite the most generous and the most enthusiastic admirers of the professionals and their best qualified critics.

You may call these poor creatures "smatterers" if you will, and they will confess that it must be so—

and confess it with a sigh of chagrin. But they do not deserve to be called pretenders, for they know their own deficiencies and under what limitations they must needs follow their favourite pursuits.

For myself, I prefer to be called a poacher in Clio's wide domains. They say you never can cure a rogue of poaching; it is born in him. I believe I shall go on poaching to the end; yes, as long as I can crawl. I have almost ceased to envy those favoured ones who have the run of the rich preserves and a dozen beaters at command and the chance of sauntering through the covers when they please, their waistbands studded with cartridges. But let such keep their temper when they see me looking over the palings. I have known a good shot hurl his gun into the hedge and vow he could not help missing shot after shot when that rascal Jem Styles was watching him. It was very weak of you, my worthy squire! We, the poachers, would do better an we had the chance, but we are only what we are:—

> "Like plants in mines which never saw the sun,
> But dream of him and guess where he may be,
> And do their best to climb and get to him."

So this time I do not call these stray papers Essays, but mere Studies—fumblings if you will—

studies after my poor fashion ; take them for what they are worth.

The first paper in this volume, entitled "St. Alban's and Her Historian," was contributed to *The Quarterly Review* soon after the issue of the concluding volume of the late Dr. Luard's magnificent edition of Matthew Paris' "Chronica Majora." It was, and it always will be, a happiness to me to reflect that the Review appeared during Dr. Luard's lifetime, and that it gave him pleasure in the reading. We had been intimate friends for more than forty years—ever since the days when we were both undergraduates at Cambridge, brought together by a community of tastes and, I think, by the unbounded influence which Dr Maitland's writings exercised upon us both, at that time of life when young men are not ashamed of being hero-worshippers.

Dr. Luard was the only Englishman of his generation who, notwithstanding that he was for twenty-five years a most earnest and faithful parish priest at Cambridge, and at the same time engaged in the somewhat laborious official duties of University Registrar, contrived to amass such stores of varied learning as few professed students have ever so much as equalled. Like all men of really profound learning he may be said to have been profusely generous in giving help to all who asked it of him, and never

was more pleased than when he was pouring forth from his stores of recondite lore some curious information which he always seemed to have ready at command. Deeply as I deplore his loss, and daily as I feel my want of him, I should never be able to tell how much I owe him.

Posterity will think of Luard and his work as the moderns think of Bingham and *his* work—wondering how scholars did without him and before him. But Luard was happier than Bingham, in that he never knew what the pinch of poverty was, and never was without the companionship of men of learning and great gifts, and never felt the grievous need of books which he could not buy nor borrow, and he did not leave a family of children behind him unprovided for nor, like Bingham, a widow who died in an almshouse. Yet the names of both one and the other are not to be found in the *Fasti Ecclesiæ Anglicanæ*.

Of the other papers in the volume, the one on the origin and growth of the English towns was written for an American monthly called *The Chautauquan*, to which Professor Freeman contributed more than once. This subject was not one of my own choosing, though I suppose the editor had been told that it was one on which I had bestowed some thought. Experts are sure to find that I have not dealt exhaustively with the question, but I hope and trust that *tiros*

may find it suggestive. The other six papers—two of which, "The Land and its Owners" and "Letters and Letter Writers," have appeared in *The Nineteenth Century*—were all delivered as lectures, and I have thought it best in revising them to retain their original form.

The plan of St. Edmund's Abbey, before the suppression of the monasteries, was compiled from trustworthy sources by Mr. W. K. Hardy, a Wesleyan minister, who was trained in an architect's office.

The original drawing is in the possession of Mr. W. S. Spanton, photographer, Bury St. Edmunds, and it is from a *negative* kindly supplied by him that our illustration has been taken on a reduced scale.

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I.

ST. ALBAN'S AND HER HISTORIAN.

FEW men of our time have done so much for English History as the late Mr. Brewer. As a teacher he was eminently stimulating, sympathetic, and enthusiastic; as a writer he was always brilliant, lucid, and vigorous; as an explorer he was a safe and sagacious guide; as an expounder of the meaning of such facts and testimony as mere advocates are very liable to misinterpret, he has rarely been surpassed. But it was as an organiser of research that he earned his greatest fame and achieved his greatest success, and it was to him more than to any one man, to his immense persistence in urging upon the powers that be a more generous freedom of access to our Records, and to his prodigious powers of work in arranging and tabulating the enormous

masses of documents of all kinds which constitute the *Apparatus* of English History, that this country stands indebted, and will remain indebted as long as our literature lasts.

In the Essay on "New Sources of English History,"[1] Mr. Brewer gave us a startling account of the deplorable condition into which some of the most precious of our national manuscripts had been allowed to fall—of the utterly chaotic state of our depositories—of the hopelessness, the despair which must needs have come upon one student after another who might be fortunate enough to be turned loose into the various prison-houses of our muniments—and of the efforts made, and happily at last made with splendid success, to cleanse the Augean stable, and to let the world know something of the wealth it contained. With characteristic modesty Mr. Brewer said nothing of his own part in all the laborious and sagacious organisation which resulted in our obtaining the magnificent "Calendars," which have opened out to us "that new world which is the old" that had become almost forgotten or unknown. He was not the man to assert himself, he knew that posterity would give him his due, but with a simple desire to stimulate research, and to

[1] "English Studies," by the late Rev. J. S. Brewer. Murray, London, 1879.

show how much remained to be done, and how much to be discovered and made known, he drew the attention of his readers chiefly and primarily to the value of the "Calendars," and to the important results which those "Calendars" had already produced, and were destined to produce hereafter. He had quite enough to say upon this point, and if his life had been spared, it is probable that he would have eventually given us a more comprehensive account of the series of volumes originally undertaken.

Such an essay by such a master would have been indeed an important aid to the student, but at the time of Mr. Brewer's lamented death the day had hardly come for such a *résumé;* and even now, though so much has been achieved, so much and so well, neither the hour nor the man has arrived for taking a comprehensive survey, and giving to the public an intelligent and intelligible account of that other Library of Chronicles, and biographies, and letters, and cartularies, and other memorials of the Middle Ages in England, which it is to be feared are hardly as well known as they ought to be, or as widely studied as they deserve.

Meanwhile it is high time that attention should be drawn to that noble series of volumes now issuing

from the press under the editorship of scholars whose reputation is assured, and whose work continues to enhance their reputation—high time that we should begin to do something like justice to the labourers, who have deserved so well at the hands of such Englishmen as have any sentiment of loyalty to the great thoughts, the great doings, and the noble lives of their forefathers. The philosopher, who "holds the mirror up to nature," has not of late, as a rule, missed his reward. The historian, who in his dogged, patient, toilsome fashion holds the mirror up to the life of bygone ages, has received among us scant recognition, and generally is rewarded with but barren honour. What has been done and still is doing will be best understood by briefly reviewing the progress of that movement, which has brought about the great revival of English Historical study, under the influence of which the opinions and convictions of educated men have passed through a very decided change, one destined to produce still greater and more unlooked for changes of sentiment and belief before the present century shall have closed.

It is just fifty years since "the Father of Record Reform," as he has been justly called, received his patent creating him Master of the Rolls. As far back as the year 1800 a Commission was issued

for the methodising and digesting the National Records, and for printing such calendars and indexes as should be thought advisable. During the next twenty-seven years many works of supreme interest and importance were printed at the public expense, but the enormous extent of our National Records was known to few, and the difficulty of consulting them (dispersed as they were through a score of different depositories) was enough to deter all but the most resolute inquirers. It was Lord Langdale who first set himself to reduce the chaos of our archives into something like order. When the old Record Commission expired in 1837, it was by Lord Langdale's influence that the Public Record Act was passed on the 14th of August, 1838, whereby the Records named therein were placed under the custody of the Master of the Rolls for the time being, and hereupon a new era began. It was, however, not till July, 1850, that a vote was obtained from the Treasury for the erection of a national depository, wherein our vast archives should be assembled under a single roof, and not till 1855 that the magnificent *Tabularium* in Fetter Lane was opened for the reception of our muniments.

Lord Langdale died in April, 1851;[1] he was succeeded in the Mastership of the Rolls by Lord

[1] Lord Langdale resigned three weeks before his death.

Romilly, then Sir John. A happier choice could not have been made. To Lord Langdale belongs the credit of carrying out the grand scheme for consolidating the various collections of documents, which, as we have said, had up to this time been widely dispersed, and the very existence of the larger mass of which was known only to a few experts. To Lord Romilly we owe it that the great original sources of English History so assembled have been rendered accessible to all students who desire to consult them; and it is to him, too, that we are indebted for the issue of that great series of "Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland, from the Invasion of the Romans to the Reign of Henry VIII.," which has laid the foundation for a science of history firmer and deeper and wider than before was believed to be even attainable.

Great men are at once the product and the leaders of their age. When Lord Langdale set himself to his task he was only attempting that which had been talked of since the reign of Edward II. For five centuries the unification of our National Records had been recommended and advised by lawyers, statesmen, and scholars from generation to generation, but no practical scheme had ever been suggested, and the difficulties in the way of reform

were supposed to be insuperable. It was a Herculean task, and one that grew ever more arduous the longer it was postponed. During the first quarter of the present century profound dissatisfaction had begun to be felt at the condition of our historical literature. The ordinary text-books were full of fables, more than suspected to be fables, and which yet it was extremely difficult to disprove satisfactorily. Theories which had long passed current were being rudely assailed, and yet—in the face of the obstacles that hindered research—stubbornly held their ground, or were repeated with peremptory dogmatism. A deep distrust of the old methods and the old assumptions had given rise to a widespread desire to drag forth from their hiding-places any documents, however dry or recondite, which might throw some clear light upon our national life and manners, and not only upon mere events of national importance during Mediæval times. A desire to know the truth was *in the air*. The science of history had passed out of its infancy, and the stirrings of a new craving—the passion of Research—were making themselves felt in that mysterious restlessness which indicates that the old smooth-faced docility, the old childish submission to tutelage, the old unquestioning acceptance of authority, has gone for ever, and a new life has begun. The year before Lord Langdale received his

appointment as Master of the Rolls, the Surtees Society had been founded for the printing of unedited MSS. illustrative of the history of the northern counties; and in the same year that the old Record Commission expired, the English Historical Society was started, a society which numbered amongst its promoters such men as the late Mr. Kemble, Mr. H. O. Coxe, Sir T. Duffus Hardy, and Mr. Stevenson —the leaders and teachers of that school of younger men who have so ably followed in the steps of their seniors, and who, mounting on the shoulders of the giants, have gained a wider view than it was given to those others to attain. The five years that followed saw the foundation of the Camden, the Percy, and the Chetham Societies, not to mention many another that has done useful work in its way. The labours of these pioneers soon made it apparent that the sources of our national history—social, ecclesiastical, and political—were quite too voluminous for private enterprise to deal with, and would demand the co-operation of a body of trained scholars and the resources of the public exchequer to make them available for the teachers of the future.

On the 26th of January, 1857, Sir John Romilly submitted to the Treasury his memorable proposal for the publication of certain materials for the

History of England;[1] and on the 9th of February a Treasury Minute was put forth approving of the plan that had been drawn up as one "well calculated for the accomplishment of this important national object in an effectual and satisfactory manner within a reasonable time." Forthwith arrangements were made for the issue of that series of works which is now known as the "Rolls Series," a collection that has already extended to upwards of 200 volumes.

The lines laid down by Sir John Romilly were almost exactly those which had been followed by the English Historical Society. Every editor was to "give an account of the MSS. employed by him, of their age and their peculiarities; that he should add to the work a brief account of the life and times of the author, and any remarks necessary to explain the chronology; but no other note or comment was to be allowed, except what might be necessary to establish the correctness of the text." The restriction was absolutely necessary if only for this, that when the "Rolls Series" was first commenced even the most accomplished

[1] The proposal to print and publish the "Calendars" had been approved by authority of the new Record Commissioners as early as January, 1840. See preface to Mr. Lemons' "Calendar" (Domestic, 1547–1580), p. viii.

of its editors were mere learners. The time had not yet arrived for comments. The text was wanted first in its completeness and integrity.

Looking back to this period—little more than a quarter of a century ago—it is difficult for us to realise the deplorable condition into which our historical literature had been allowed to fall. Kemble's great work, the "Codex Diplomaticus ævi Saxonici," the first volume of which appeared in 1839, and his "History of the Saxons in England," published in 1849, came upon the great body of intelligent men as the revelation of new things. It is sufficient to turn to the chapter on the Constitutional History of England before the Conquest, in Hallam's "History of the Middle Ages," to be assured how meagre and superficial even Hallam's knowledge was of everything before the Norman invasion. It was no fault of his; he made good use of all such materials as were then accessible to the student—that is, all such as had been printed; for that incomparably larger body of evidence which since Hallam's days has been published to the world, it was for all practical purposes as if it had never existed at all. Even men of culture and learning were persuaded that all that was ever likely to be known about the religious houses had been collected in the new

edition of Dugdale's "Monasticon." It is hardly too much to say that of the history of English monasticism Hallam knew nothing. Dr. Lingard himself had very little more to say of the great abbeys than his predecessors, and had a very inadequate conception of the part they played in the development of our institutions; and when Dr. Maitland wrote his brilliant "Essays on the Dark Ages," he hardly names St. Edmundsbury or St. Alban's, and though one of his most fascinating chapters is concerned with the early days of Croyland, his only authority for the beautiful story which he has handled so skilfully is a romantic narrative attributed to Ingulphus, which has been demonstrated to be a somewhat clumsy though a clever forgery.[1] Of the Mendicant Orders—of the work they did, of the influence they exercised, and of the attitude adopted towards them in the 13th century by the parochial clergy on the one hand, and by the monks on the other—even less was known, if less were possible, than of their wealthier rivals.

Two years had scarcely elapsed since the issue of

[1] A masterly exposure of this curious forgery, eminently characteristic of the learned author's searching and sagacious criticism, has just appeared from the pen of F. Liebermann. *Ueber Ostenglische Geschicts quellen des* 12, 13, 14. *Jahrhunderts, besonders den falschen Ingulf.* Hanover, Halm. 1892.

the Treasury Minute of February, 1857, before it began to be said that the history of England would have to be written anew. In the single year 1858 eleven works of the highest importance were printed, and it was evident that neither original materials nor scholarly editors would be wanting to make the "Rolls Series" all that it was desired it should become. The "Chronicles of the Monasteries of Abingdon and of St. Augustine at Canterbury," the contemporary "Life of Edward the Confessor," and the priceless "Monumenta Franciscana," telling the wonderful story of the settlement of the Minorites among us, were printed from unique MSS. Next year the "Chronicle of John of Oxnedes" was brought out by Sir Henry Ellis; and the "Historia Anglicana" of Bartholomew Cotton, by Dr. Luard, neither work having ever before been printed. Volume followed volume in rapid succession, a steady improvement becoming observable in the style of editing, as the several editors became more familiar with the results of their predecessors' labours.

It was while working at Bartholomew Cotton that Dr. Luard was brought into intimate relations with the 13th century. Hitherto the *composite* character of such chronicles as had been published had indeed been perceived, but no attempt had been made to

trace the original authority for statements repeated in the same words by one writer after another. Dr. Luard opened out a new line of inquiry, and in his edition of Cotton's Chronicle he endeavoured to distinguish in every instance the material which might fairly be called original from that which his author had borrowed from older writers and incorporated into his text. The borrowed matter was printed in smaller type, and the sources from which it had been derived were indicated by references given at the foot of the page. Cotton's own additions were printed in a bolder type, so as at once to catch the eye. While conducting the laborious researches necessitated by this new method of editing his text, it became clear to Dr. Luard that Cotton had borrowed largely from Matthew Paris—who had lived just a generation before him—and that he had also borrowed from a mysterious writer much read in the 14th and 15th centuries, who went by the name of Matthew of Westminster. As to this Matthew of Westminster, Dr. Luard postponed dealing with him till some future time. He might prove a mere mythic personage, and it was suspected he would; but Matthew Paris was certainly no shadow but a very real man, whose greatness seemed to grow greater the more he was studied and the better he was known. Yet as Dr. Luard

became more familiar with the text of Paris, he was soon convinced that in its printed form it was bristling with the grossest inaccuracies of all kinds. Originally it had been published under the authority of Archbishop Parker in 1571; and though other editions had appeared in this country and on the Continent, several times since then, Paris's great work had remained exactly in the same state as Parker (or whoever his agent was) had left it three centuries ago. That is to say, that by far the most important work on English history during the 13th century—not to mention European affairs—and by far the most minute and trustworthy picture of English life and manners during the reign of Henry III.—a record, too, drawn up by a contemporary writer of rare genius and literary skill—was defaced by blunders and audacious tampering with the text and by gross inaccuracies, to such an extent that no conscientious student could allow himself to quote the printed work without first referring to one of the very MSS. which the Archbishop professed to have used.

Nevertheless, the task of bringing out a critical edition of the "Chronica Majora" did not appear less formidable as fresh sources of information cropped up; and if Dr. Luard shrank from the immense labour that such an edition involved, it

was because he had formed a correct notion of its magnitude. In 1861 he brought out in the same series the "Letters of Robert Grosseteste," the heroic and magnanimous Bishop of Lincoln; and while working at this volume, the England of the 13th century became more and more alive and present to his mind.

But distinctly and grandly as one noble character after another revealed itself, there was a strange mist that required to be dispelled before even the importance of great events could be rightly estimated. The inner life of the monasteries, great and small, must be inquired into, so far as it was possible to get any information on so obscure a subject; and, above all, the paramount influence which so magnificent an institution as the Abbey of St. Alban's exercised upon the intellectual life of the country must be studied with patient impartiality. Before a scholar with so lofty an ideal of an editor's duty could venture upon his *magnum opus*, there was indeed an enormous mass of preliminary work to get through. The horizon seemed to widen everywhere as the years of historical discovery went on. It was left to Mr. Riley to attack that wonderful collection of documents to which he gave the title of "Chronica Monasterii Sancti Albani"—a series occupying twelve thick volumes, and which furnish us not only with a

priceless *Apparatus*, by the help of which a hundred problems perplexing the historian are furnished with a clue towards their solution—but which afford such an insight into the life of the greatest monastery in England during its best times as nobody expected could ever be forthcoming. While Mr. Riley was occupied with the "Chronicles" of St. Alban's and the lives of its Abbots, Dr. Luard was engaged in collecting all the "Annals" of the lesser monasteries which he could lay his hands on. Some of these had already been printed more or less carelessly; others had never seen the light since they were written. Such as were printed were extremely difficult to procure—scarce and costly. Dr. Luard took six years in bringing out his five volumes—volumes referring to the golden age of English Monasticism, which threw all sorts of side-light upon Mr. Riley's "Chronicles," while they were in turn continually being explained and illustrated by them.

While the "Monastic Annals" were passing through the press, a very startling announcement was made by no less a person than Sir Frederick Madden, Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum. Sir Frederick declared that he had come upon a copy of what was commonly called the "Historia Minor" of Matthew Paris, not only written by the author himself, but actually

annotated, corrected, and illustrated with drawings by his own hand. Such an announcement made by an expert of European reputation, one who had been handling MSS. all his life, necessarily created a sensation in the literary world. If it were accepted and proved true, it was one of the most curious romances in the history of literature. But was it true? To most critics the antecedent improbability of the theory put forth by Sir Frederick was so great as to relegate it to the domain of extravagant paradox; but the name and fame of its supporter were too high to allow of its being dismissed without refutation. For two or three years no one ventured to enter the lists against so formidable a champion who had staked his reputation upon the issue. At last another great specialist, not a whit less competent than the other, came forward to controvert the opinions and theory which had been so confidently maintained by Sir Frederick. In 1871 Sir Thomas Duffus Hardy brought out the third volume of his "Catalogue," and it was in the famous Introduction to this volume that the Madden Hypothesis was first assailed with damaging effect. Sir Thomas, it must be remembered, was Deputy Keeper of the Records. Sir Frederick was Keeper of the Department of Manuscripts at the British Museum. Each was the representative man in his own department, and a

very pretty quarrel arose. Into the merits of that quarrel it is impossible to enter here; it is a matter for specialists, not for outsiders, to pronounce upon. This, however, may be said with confidence, that if we except that school of very able and accomplished experts which the British Museum has trained, experts whose *range* of diplomatic knowledge must needs be wider than that of any "Record man," the refutation of Sir Frederick Madden by Sir Thomas Duffus was generally regarded as unanswerable and triumphant. With the exception indicated—a very important exception indeed—the Madden Hypothesis was believed to be utterly demolished. Nevertheless there are those, from whom something may be expected some day in the way of rejoinder, who are by no means sure that the last word on this question has been said that requires to be said, and even so scrupulous and sagacious a critic as Dr. Luard grew less certain than he had once been that Madden was quite wrong in *all* he affirmed, and Hardy quite right in *all* he denied.

The attention which had been drawn to Matthew Paris by this remarkable controversy could not but have its effect in awakening a desire for that critical edition of the larger Chronicle which Dr. Luard had been so long preparing. The way was cleared for such an edition now; it was not likely that any more MSS.

of the author would be discovered. Such as were deposited in the various libraries had been carefully scrutinised, or their homes were known, and the long years of preparatory study had been turned to good account—no pains had been spared nor any labour grudged. In 1872 the first volume of the "Chronica Majora" appeared in the "Rolls Series." In 1884 the seventh and last volume was issued, containing the learned editor's last preface, glossary, and emendations, and an Index to the whole work, extending over nearly 600 pages. It is a long time since an English scholar has had the good fortune to carry to its completion so important a work as this, projected on so large a scale, executed with such conscientious care—characterised by so much critical skill and scrupulous accuracy—and all this achieved single-handed in the midst of duties, professional and academical, quite sufficient to exhaust the energies of an ordinary man.

Now that the work has been done, and done so thoroughly that it may safely be asserted the *standard edition* of the "Chronica Majora" has been published once for all, we are in a better position than we ever were heretofore for taking a survey of the life and labours of its author, and for answering the inquiries which of late have been made with increasing frequency, and made too among those

who might have been expected to be able to answer them. Who and what was Matthew Paris? What did he do, and what did he write that the learned few should speak of him with so much reverence, though to the unlearned many he is little more than a famous and familiar name?

Perhaps before dealing with his personal history, or entering into any examination of his literary labours, it will be well first to answer the question—*What* was Matthew Paris? for it is simply impossible to estimate rightly the debt we owe to him, or to understand the brief account that could be drawn up of his career, until we have learned to know something of the *profession* to which he belonged, and the great foundation of which he was so distinguished an ornament. By profession Matthew Paris was a monk. A monk "professed" is a term indicating the higher grade to which not every brother in a monastery attained. The very term "profession" may be traced to the cloister. In its usual acceptation it is modern.

To dilate upon the various monastic orders, which were almost as numerous in the 13th century as the different religious denominations are in the 19th, would be out of place here. Suffice it to say that the English monasteries in Henry III.'s time counted by hundreds. But there were monasteries

and monasteries. Some the homes of the scholar, the devout and the high-minded, the seats of learning and the resting-places of the studious and the aged, who hated war and tumult, and only longed for repose. Some that were mere hiding-holes for the lazy and the incompetent, the failures among the younger sons of the gentry, who had not the power of pushing their way in the world, or whose career had been a disappointment. Such men, when all else failed, could get themselves admitted into some smaller religious house by the interest of the patron; sometimes bringing in a trifling addition to the common property, sometimes simply "pitchforked" into a vacancy, it is difficult to say how. Then they became "brethren" of the monastery, and sharers in most of the good things that it could offer; they were almost exactly in the same position as Fellows of Colleges were twenty years ago, holding their preferment for life, with this difference, that a Fellowship at the smallest College in Oxford or Cambridge always implied *some* qualification for the post. A College Fellow, at the worst, must have had some claims to learning or culture; whereas in the smaller and more remote monasteries a man might be scandalously ignorant, and yet gain admittance as a brother of the house.

Between the highest and the lowest of that great

army of monks, dispersed through the length and breadth of the land, when English monachism had declined from its earlier ideal, there was as great a distance as there is at this moment between the Fellows of Balliol or Trinity, and the poor brethren of the Charterhouse, or the bedesmen in the cathedrals of the old foundation.

In the first half of the 13th century English monachism was at its best; the 12th century was emphatically the reformation age of British monachism. All the many schemes for starting new orders with improved *Rules*, and all the efforts to improve the discipline of the religious houses and fan the fire of devotion among their members, assumed that the monasteries were then living institutions with vast powers for good, and institutions which needed only to be reformed to make them all that the most earnest and ardent enthusiast claimed that they ought to be, and might become. In the fifty years preceding the accession of King John, more than 200 monasteries had been built and endowed—some of them munificently endowed, and the only purely English order (that of St. Gilbert of Sempringham) had been founded, and in little more than fifty years could count no less than fourteen considerable houses. Englishmen believed in the monastic system as they have never believed in any-

thing else since then. Never have such prodigious sacrifices been made, never have such lavish munificence been shown by the *upper classes* as during the century ending with the accession of Edward I. In the next hundred years they were chiefly the townsmen and traders, not the landed proprietors, who emptied their money-bags into the lap of the Begging Friars. Certainly the great religious houses at the end of the 13th century had the entire confidence of the country, and it is impossible to understand the long reign of Henry III. unless we are fully awake to the fact that then, too, the monasteries were not only thriving and powerful, but were institutions on whose help and power the people leant with an assured confidence, because they were pre-eminently the people's friends.

But between the old foundations which had a history and the new houses that were springing up in every shire, some feeling of jealousy and soreness was sure to arise. The old abbeys, with a history that looked back into a past all clouds and mist, but none the less glorious for that, affected a supercilious tone towards the mushrooms that had of late sprouted into vigorous life. A man need not be an old man to remember when the Eton and Winchester boys at the Universities affected an air of contempt for all the " modern " places of education, and dis-

dained to number such institutions as Cheltenham or Clifton among the "public schools." These were all very well in their way, but where were their traditions? So with the older and grander Benedictine monasteries, with charters from Saxon kings, let alone anything else. Glastonbury, where men said two of the Apostles had built themselves a house of prayer, and where St. Patrick and St. Dunstan lay entombed; Canterbury, where Augustine, the English apostle, found a home; Malmesbury, where St. Aldhelm preached to the barbarous people, and when they tired of his sermon played to them upon his harp, and, anticipating Mr. Sankey, sang David's Psalms to the crowds that moved by him as they passed over the bridge of Avon. These venerable foundations, about whose origin a glamour of mystery had gathered, whose history had become strangely obscured by the body of myths that had grown up in the lapse of centuries—which had survived pillage and anarchy, and all the horrors of fire and sword, desolating, devastating—were there before men's eyes, testifying to the amazing vitality which a millennium of strange vicissitudes had not only not destroyed, but not even impaired.

Such a mighty pile of buildings, as had risen up to heaven there in the old Roman town of Verulam,

appealed to the imagination of mankind—the very materials of the massive tower, ruddy in the blaze of the noon-day, must have been a wonder and astonishment to many an awe-struck pilgrim perplexed at the first sight of Roman bricks burnt on the spot a thousand years ago. There stood the mighty Roman rampart, vast, enormous—the ground beneath his feet teeming with the tangible memories of grisly conflict, or of an old civilisation that had been blotted out long ago—the swords of Roman legionaries, the bones of British heroes, coins with legends that few could read turned up by the ploughman's share. Yonder, men said, away there at Redburn, the heathen pursuers had come upon England's proto-martyr and slain the saint of God, whose bones since then had been gathered up, and were now resting in their sumptuous shrine. When the Norman came, and the new order was set up in the land—not a day before it was needed—the thirteenth Abbot of St. Alban's was of the blood royal, and heir, they said, to Cnut, the Danish king, who had passed away. It was to him that the awful Conqueror made oath he would bind himself by the Confessor's laws, an oath which, if he ever meant to keep, he meant to interpret according to his mood. Even the very laxity and short-comings of the abbots of generations back, which tradition, and something

more to be trusted than tradition, declared to have been matters of scandal, proved no more than that the great abbey could live through evil times, outride the storms which would wreck weaker vessels, and right itself, though overloaded with abuses which timid pilots would have shrunk from throwing overboard: and now that 400 years had passed since Offa, the Saxon king—(stirred thereto by Karl, the Emperor)—had founded the monastery in St. Alban's honour, and from generation to generation vast building operations had been going on almost without interruption, and the old abbey still held up its head proudly, its abbot taking precedence of every other in the land; any man might be excused for thinking that to become a monk of St. Alban's Abbey was to become a personage of no small consideration.

Verily it was a great abbey in the days of King John. There, in the eighth year of that King's reign, was held that memorable council which, if it had been let alone, would doubtless have issued its protest against the intolerable aggression of the Pope and his *curia*. There, six years afterwards, another assembly was convened; the first occasion on which we find any historical proof that representatives were summoned to a national council in England. Eight times during his reign the ruffian King was himself a guest at the abbey. Once after John's death, when

Louis was desperately struggling to hold his own against young Henry's friends and supporters, he too came to St. Alban's, and threatened to give it over to fire and sword: only money saved it from a sack. There was always something to take, and yet always wonderful state kept up. The magnates in Church and State were for ever going in and out; the mere domestic expenditure was enormous. Yet, even when the country was groaning under horrible anarchy, and grinding taxation, and war and poverty, the building went on as if men lived only to glorify the great house, to raise its church tower, or beautify the west front, to fill the windows with stained glass, or erect the splendid pulpit in the nave —a very miracle of art.

It would be a very great mistake to conclude that all this lavish expenditure implied the enjoyment of large rents from land. The revenue derived from the tenants of the abbey and the profits of farming were no doubt considerable; but that revenue could never have sufficed alone to defray the cost of keeping up the establishment. In point of fact, when a monastery, great or small, depended wholly upon its landed property, it invariably got into debt; sometimes it got hopelessly into debt. It is clear that before the Dissolution a very large number of the religious houses were insolvent. The striking

paucity in the number of "religious" at the time of the suppression—for hardly one house in ten had its full complement of inmates—is by no means wholly to be attributed to the reluctance on the part of people in general to take upon themselves the monastic vows. Where a monastery was financially in a critical condition, the brotherhood resorted to the expedient which is at this moment being carried out at more than one College in Oxford and Cambridge. Now, when times are bad, we temporarily suppress a Fellowship; then, on the death of a brother of the house, they chose no monk into his place.

The income from landed estates at St. Alban's was probably at no time equal to what may be called the extraordinary income. The offerings at the shrines of SS. Alban and Amphibalus, the proceeds of the offertory at those magnificent and dramatic functions in which the multitude delighted, and the *douceurs* that were always expected and almost always given in return for hospitality, only in theory free,—these and many another source of profit, which the universal habit of giving money for "pious uses" supplied, all made up a grand sum total. The rent-roll furnished but a fraction of the annual income. The lands of a monastery made it a power; but it was only a question of time when it must get into

serious difficulties if it had no means of support other than its net rental. In the taxation of Pope Nicholas (A.D. 1291) the whole revenue of the abbey from rent and dues in the liberty of St. Alban's is set down at £392 8*s.* 3¼*d.*, a sum which in those days would go as far as £5,000 a year now. Even granting that this was only half the net income derivable from the abbey's estates, which were widely distributed, an expenditure of £10,000 a year would go in our own time a very little way towards meeting the charges which such an enormous establishment involved. The mere keeping up the buildings at all times entailed a very heavy annual outlay. Already in the 13th century the precincts of the abbey were overcrowded with palatial edifices, which were never pulled down except to make room for larger ones. There were acres of roofs within the abbey walls.

And what return was being made to the nation, that every rank and every class were keeping up a rivalry in munificence in favour of such an institution as this? What had they done, what were they doing, these seventy men, with their Abbot at their head, who were in the enjoyment of an income larger than that of many a principality? How was it that no one *in those days* accused them of being indolent drones? Mere burdens upon the earth, as they were called frequently enough, and

loudly enough, and angrily enough, three centuries later? It was the age for the expansion of the monastic system—none then wished to sweep the monks away. One of the reasons why the monasteries had retained their hold upon the affection of the people, and were regarded with reverence and pride and confidence, lay in this, that they had moved with the times, and that the monasticism of the 13th was very different indeed from the monasticism of the 9th century. The primitive asceticism had almost vanished; it had not however died leaving nothing in its place. No one now expected to find the religious houses filled with religious people, every one holy, devout, and fervent; the personal sanctity of the inmates was one thing, the sanctity of their churches and shrines was quite another. In the old days the monks were separate from the world, living to save their own souls at best; examples to such as trembled at the wrath of God, and longed for the life to come. As time went on they mixed more boldly with the sinful world, and gradually they became more and more the illuminators of the darkness round them. Now they were regarded as in great measure the salt of the earth, and if that salt should lose its savour, where was such virtue elsewhere to be found? Personally, the men might be worldly—vicious,

as a rule, they certainly were not—they were, *mutatis mutandis*, what in our time would be called cultured gentlemen, courteous, highly educated and refined, as compared with the great mass of their contemporaries; a privileged class who were not abusing their privileges; a class from whence all the art and letters and accomplishments of the time emanated, allied in blood as much with the low as the high, the aristocracy of intellect, and the pioneers of scientific and material progress. The model farming of the 13th century would be regarded as barbaric by our modern theorists; but such as it was, it was only to be met with on the demesne lands of the larger monasteries, and was a prodigious advance upon the *petite culture* of the open fields. The Priory at Norwich made an income out of its garden in the days of Edward III., and probably much earlier; the pisciculture of the religious houses remains a mystery as yet unsolved; the skill exhibited in the management of the water-power of many a district round even the smaller houses, still awakens wonder in those who think it worth their while to study it. At St. Alban's, as at Glastonbury, St. Edmund's Abbey, and elsewhere, the culture of the vine was made profitable for generations. The monasteries were the first to give personal freedom to the villeins, and the first

to commute for money payments the vexatious *services* which worried the best men and maddened the worst. The landlords in the 13th century were real *lords* of the *land*. They were, as a class, very poor, spite of the privileges they enjoyed and the power that they possessed of making themselves disagreeable ; and though the constitution of a *manor* was a limited monarchy, and the *limits* were very many, yet the lord could exercise a great deal of petty tyranny in his little kingdom if he were so disposed. In the manors which were in the possession of the religious houses the lord was necessarily non-resident, and the tenants were left to manage their own affairs with very little interference. The tenants of the monasteries were in a far more favoured condition than the tenants of some small lord, needy and greedy, who extorted his dues literally to the last farthing, and who knew exactly what the best beast was, on the land that owed him a heriot; and, when the tenant was *in extremis*, kept a sharp look-out that a fat bullock or a promising young horse should not be driven off before the owner died.

So the monasteries, at the time we are now concerned with, were regarded at once with pride and affection by the great bulk of the people ; they were places of refuge where, in a turbulent time, men and

women who had been stricken, bereaved or wronged, might find a quiet refuge and hide their heads and be forgotten and fall asleep, with the prayers of other sufferers to console and support them in their passage through the valley of the shadow of death. The gentlest spirits here could taste the bliss of a holy tranquillity; the ascetic could indulge his most fantastic self-immolation; the morbid visionary could dream at his will and give his imagination full play, none hindering him; evil demons might chatter and gibe and twit him at his prayers; choirs of angels might calm his despair with celestial lullabies; awful forms might rise from clouds of incense as the gorgeous procession moved along the vast church aisles, or stopped before some glittering shrine. What then? Who would question the reality of a miracle, or doubt that sublime revelations might be made to any holy monk as he wrestled in prayer in a rapture of the soul, and found himself lifted to the seventh heaven in ecstasy unutterable?

What has been said applies mainly to the older houses, those which were under what may be called the *primitive* Benedictine rule. If men were moved to rigid asceticism, however, and had a taste for bald simplicity; if art, and music, and ornate architecture had no charm for them, and they dreamt that God could only be sought and found in the

wilderness, the Cistercian houses offered such a congenial asylum. The Cistercians were the Puritans of the monasteries, and appealed to that mysterious sentiment which makes some minds shrink with fear from the touch of luxury, and regard culture as antagonistic to personal holiness. The sentiment was strong in the reign of Henry II., when nineteen Cistercian houses were founded; but it is not improbable that other motives, beside mere taste for a stricter discipline, led to the foundation of eight more in the reign of King John.

Meanwhile the Benedictines had become by far the most learned and most *educating* body in the land, and pre-eminent above them all was the great Abbey of St. Alban's. If it was not at this time the centre of intellectual life in England, it was because at this time centralisation was unknown. Eadmer, Florence of Worcester, Gervase of Canterbury, William of Malmesbury, Simeon of Durham, were all 12th century Benedictines. They were all students and writers of history, and history meant *literature* till Peter Lombard arose at the end of the 12th century and revolutionised the world of thought—at any rate the domain of logic. John of Salisbury fiercely assails the intellectual innovators of his time on the ground that the new lights of the 12th century disdained to be students of history, and

affected contempt for the past. It was the old story; literary culture found itself in antagonism with scientific culture, and the vigorous childhood of scientific research was aggressive, insolent, and noisily insubordinate. The old seminaries, whose homes were in the Benedictine monasteries, refused to welcome the new learning. Its teachers settled themselves elsewhere; at Paris, on the other side of the water, they had a hard fight of it. Once in 1209 the Synod of Paris actually prohibited the reading of Aristotle's "Metaphysics." At Oxford they seem to have met with a more generous reception. Perhaps it was because that reception was too enthusiastic that King Stephen at the close of his miserable reign expelled Vacarius, the first teacher of scientific law in England. Whereupon young men of parts and ambition crossed the Channel, seeking and finding at Pavia and Bologna what was not to be had at home. The monastic schools held their own, and went on in the old groove; the intellectual revolution which soon came about by the agency of the Mendicant Orders was not yet dreamt of. St. Alban's, Malmesbury, and other such mighty foundations, stuck to the old studies, just as Eton and Winchester stuck to Latin Verse as the one thing needful, and reluctantly gave in to the new-fangled notion of having a "modern side."

Outside the abbey precincts, a hundred yards from the great gate, and separated from it by the *Rome land*, which may possibly have served the boys as a playground, stood the Grammar School. Whether it offered a different training from that which was usually supplied to the scholars who were under training in the cloister, it is difficult to say. Within the precincts, when the 13th century began, there stood the great church—enriched by the accumulated offerings of centuries, and glowing with dazzling splendour of jewels and cloth of gold, and glass that glorified the very sunshine, and wonders of sculpture and colour and needlework filling the heart to overflowing with inexplicable hopes and longings for an ideal that seemed possible of realisation, if only the Church in heaven should be as far removed above the actual of the Church on earth as the glories of the Church on earth were removed above the squalid life of the common workday world. All this in witness that the great Abbey was, first and foremost, a religious foundation, raised in the first instance to the glory of God, and meant to help forward the worship of God, and make that worship worthy of the Most High.

But besides being primarily and emphatically a religious foundation, the abbey in the 13th century had grown into something else, and had become

the home of a corporation of scholars and students, who were the leaders of art and culture in an age when art and culture were to be met with nowhere outside the walls of a great monastery. There, in what might be called the museum of the abbey, you might see no mean collection of antique gems that had once been the pride of Roman magistrates. Mysterious specimens of barbaric gold-work, fashioned by unknown craftsmen for the necks of nameless chieftains who had drawn the sword and perished, none knew when. Engraved gems that had been dug up in mysterious sepulchres, about which even imagination despaired of telling any story; relics of saints and martyrs; charters of Saxon kings, granted centuries before the Normans came to ring out the old and ring in the new. The wealth of mere archæological specimens at St. Alban's made it such a museum of antiquities as provokes wonder and bitterness, when we read the catalogue of what was once there, and has perished utterly and for ever.[1]

The range of buildings to the south of the church

[1] In Dr. Luard's sixth volume there are two facsimiles of certain coloured drawings of the more precious gems at St. Alban's, with careful descriptions of them, the text and the illustrations being most probably *executed by Matthew Paris himself.*

covered a far larger area than that which the church itself occupied. Uncertain though the exact site may be and is, there had already been added in Brother Matthew's time what we should now call an Art school, a Library, and, almost more famous than all, the Scriptorium. By and by, too, came the printing-press, which John Herford set up in 1480. Wynkyn de Worde was sometime schoolmaster of St. Alban's, and Lady Juliana Berner's famous volume issued from the Abbey Press, while Caxton was still pursuing his craft in the almonry of another monastery at Westminster.

In the days of King John, however, people had so little idea of the possibility of the printing-press, that they were almost equally ignorant of such a material as paper for literary purposes. Yet it is a huge mistake which has not yet been exploded, as it ought to be, that reading and writing were rare accomplishments in the 13th century. Knowledge of a certain kind was disseminated far more effectively and far more universally than is generally believed. The country parson was expected to be the schoolmaster of his parish, and generally was so, and there was hardly a village in England during the reign of Henry III. in which there were not one or more persons who could write a *clerkly* hand, draw up accounts *in Latin*, and keep the records of the various

petty courts and gatherings that were continually being held, sometimes to the annoyance and grievous vexation of the rural population. The professional *writers* were so numerous, and their training so severe, that they had got for themselves privileges of a very exceptional kind; the *clerk* took rank with the *clergyman*, and the *writer* of a book was almost as much esteemed as its *author*.

The scriptorium of a great monastery was at once the printing-press and the publishing office. It was the place where books were written, and whence they issued to the world. With the traditional exclusiveness of the older monasteries there was less desire, no doubt, to diffuse and disperse than to accumulate books, but the composing and the multiplication of books was always going on. The scriptorium was a great writing school too, and the rules of the art of writing which were laid down there were so rigidly and severely adhered to, that to this day it is not difficult to decide at a glance whether a book was written in St. Alban's or St. Edmund's Abbey. Sometimes as many as twenty writers were employed at once, and besides these there were occasionally supernumeraries, who were professional scribes, and who were paid for their services; but nothing short of perfect penmanship, such trained skill, for instance, as would now be required of an engraver, would qualify

a copyist to take part in the finished work, which the copying of important books required.

One of the conclusions which Sir Thomas Hardy arrived at during the course of his minute examination of Sir Frederick Madden's theory is so curious, and opens out such an unexpected view of the way in which our monasteries may have been brought under the influence of foreign literature, that it is worth while in this connection to quote the great critic's own words:—

"After minutely examining every page of the manuscripts in question, as well as others, which were undoubtedly written in the monastery of St. Alban's, and comparing them with others executed in various parts of England and on the Continent, I can come to no other conclusion than that during the latter half of the 13th century, and perhaps a little earlier, there prevailed among the scribes in the Scriptorium of St. Alban's, a peculiar character of writing which is not recognisable in any other religious house in England during that period; but which is traceable in some foreign manuscripts, and even in private deeds executed in England in the neighbourhood of St. Alban's during the 12th and 13th centuries. These facts lead me to the inference, that *the schoolmaster who taught the art of writing to Matthew Paris and the other members and scholars*

of the establishment at St. Alban's was a foreigner; that his pupils not only imitated their instructor in the formation of his letters, but also in his exceptional orthography."

What questions suggest themselves as we accept the conclusion arrived at! Who was he, this "foreigner," who had come from across the sea to bring in his outlandish novelties into the great scriptorium? Was he some "Frenchman" imported from sunny Champagne, where Thibaut, the mawkish singer, was making verses which his people loved to listen to? Did he teach the young novices French as well as writing? Did he touch the lute himself on Feast-days, and charm them with some new lyric of Gasse Bruslé, or delight them with one of Rutebeuf's merry ditties? France was all alive with song at this time, and princes were rivals now for poetic fame. It may be that this "foreigner" brought in a taste for light literature as well as for a new fashion in penmanship, and made known to his pupils such alluring novelties as the "Roman d'Alexandre," soon to be eclipsed by the "Roman de la Rose."[1]

The scriptorium at St. Alban's was founded by Abbot Paul, a kinsman of Archbishop Lanfranc, when the great abbey had already existed for three cen-

[1] See Eugène Gerusez, "Histoire de la Littérature Française." Livre I, chap. v. Didier, Paris, 1863.

turies. Paul became Abbot eleven years after the Conquest, and he showed himself an able and earnest administrator. From this time learning and a love of books became a tradition of the house. Abbot after abbot continued to add to the collection of MSS., and to increase the value of the library. But St. Alban's had never had a great historian of its own. Strange and shameful fact! East and west and north and south, all over the land, there were great writers holding up their proud heads. Out in the desolate wilds there at Peterborough, they had been actually keeping up a chronicle for centuries—aye, and written in the vernacular too. The lonely monastery of Ely, among the swamps, had its historian. Malmesbury boasted her learned William; and Worcester, which St. Wulstan had raised from the dust, as it were, only the other day, had already her Florence. In the great houses of the Northern Province there had been no lack of writers to whom the past was an open book. Even Westminster had long ago had her *chronographer*, and far away in furthest Wales, Geoffrey, the Monmouth man, was making men open their eyes very wide indeed with tales—idle tales they might be, but they were well worth the reading—and there was talk too of another young Welshman, Giraldus, who was on the way towards outdoing the other by and by. What are

we coming to? Holy St. Alban, shalt thou and thy house be put to shame?—that be far from us!

Thus it came to pass that about a century after the foundation of the scriptorium, and when the library had grown to an imposing size, Abbot Simon bestirred himself, and a new office was created in the abbey, to wit, that of Historiographer. In our time we should have given this functionary a grander title, and called him Professor of History; but in the 12th century, they called him what he was, a writer of history, and from this time, in fact, the writing of history, after a certain authorised method, began, and what has been called and deserves to be called the St. Alban's School of History took its rise.

It is evident that before the 13th century had well begun, an historical compendium of great value had already been drawn up, which must have been compiled by careful students with a command of books such as during this age was rare.

"The compilation," says Dr. Luard, "whenever and by whomsoever it was written, must be regarded as a very curious and remarkable one. The very large number of sources consulted, the miscellaneous character of many of the extracts, the mixture of history and legend, the giving fixed years to stories which even writers like Geoffrey of Monmouth had

left undated, the care at one time and the carelessness at another, the slavishness with which one authority is followed, and the recklessness with which another is altered, the frequent confusion of dates, their ignorance and want of care, the blunders displayed in many instances from the compiler not understanding the author whom he is copying, as is especially the case in the extracts from the 'Anglo-Saxon Chronicle'; all these characteristics may well earn for the author the title that Lappenberg has given to him, though under the name of 'Matthew of Westminster,' namely, that of the 'Verwirrer der Geschichte.' At the same time there is no doubt that he had access to some materials which we no longer possess: and my object has been to trace all his statements, where possible, to their source, and to distinguish any additions that the compiler has made when they are merely rhetorical amplifications of his own, or when they are really from some source not now extant" (Pref. to vol. i. p. xxiii.).

After all that can be said, the work surprises us by the erudition it displays. Nor is that surprise lessened when we have gone through the masterly analysis of its contents, which Dr. Luard has given us in the Preface to his first vol. Such as it was, it became the great text-book on which Roger of Wendover founded his own labours when he incor-

porated it into the chronicle which he left behind him. Roger of Wendover did good work, and laboriously epitomised, supplemented, and improved, but he was a mere literary monk after all; a student, a bookworm, simple, conscientious, and truthful; a trustworthy reporter, "a picker-up of learning's crumbs," a monkish historiographer, in short; but by no means an historian of large views and of original mind. Roger of Wendover died in 1236, and Matthew Paris succeeded to his office and work.

From what has been said, the reader may be presumed to have gained something like an answer to our first question: *What* was Brother Matthew? Briefly, he was a representative monk of the most powerful monastery in England during the 13th century, when that monastery was at its best, and doing the work which in after times the Universities and great schools of the country took out of the hands of the religious houses; work, too, which since those days has been done by the printing-press, and by many other institutions better fitted to deal with the requirements of an immensely larger population, and to be the instruments for diffusing culture and refinement through the nation after it had outgrown the older machinery.

When we come to look into the personal history of Brother Matthew, the details of his biography need

not detain us long. Sir Henry Taylor's famous line is only half true, after all;

"The world knows nothing of its greatest men"

really means that the world knows less about them than it would like to know. And yet the world knows almost as much about them as is good for it. The leading facts of a man's career are all that concern most of us—the main lines—not the details. Of Matthew Paris we know enough, because he has himself given us so faithful a picture of his times, and so charming an insight into the daily life which he led.

Unnecessary doubt has been suggested as to his parentage, and whether his extraction was or was not from a stock that could boast of gentle blood. For our part we incline strongly to the belief that Brother Matthew was called Paris because that was his name, and had been his father's name before him. A family of that name held lands in Bedfordshire in Henry III.'s time; others of the same stock were settled in Lincolnshire earlier still; and the Cambridgeshire family (one of whom was among the visitors of the monasteries under Henry VIII.) boasted of a long line of ancestors, and retained their estates in the Eastern Counties till late in

the 17th century. Young Matthew probably received his education in the school at St. Alban's, and soon showed a decided taste for learning and the student's life, and that in the 13th century meant an inclination for the life of the cloister. Many a precocious lad is even now taught from his childhood to look forward to the glories of a College Fellowship, and the career which such an academic success may open to him; and in the 13th century a schoolboy's ambition was directed to the goal of admission to a great monastery—that step on the ladder which whosoever could reach, there was no knowing how high he might climb—how high above the common sons of earth or, if he preferred it, how high towards the heaven that is above the earth.

Matthew was probably born about the year 1200, and in January, 1217, he became a monk at St. Alban's, *i.e.*, he became a *novice*. At this time a lad could commence his noviciate at 15; but the age was subsequently advanced to 19, the younger limit having been found, as a rule, too early even for the preliminary discipline required. On the day after the lad was admitted, a frightful scene took place in the monastery. A band of Fawkes de Breauté's cutthroats had stormed the town of St. Alban's, burst into the abbey, and slaughtered at the door of the church one Robert Mai, a servant of the Abbot.

William de Trumpington was Abbot at this time, a vigorous and resolute personage, who ruled the convent with a firm hand. Like all really able men, he was ably seconded, for he knew how to choose his subordinates. At first the monks had repented of their choice, and there were quarrels and litigation and appeals to the Pope, and many serious "unpleasantnesses"; but as time went on, Abbot William had won the allegiance of all the convent, and they were proud of him. He was a man of books, among his other virtues, and had an eye for bookish men; and when he deposed Roger de Wendover from being Prior of Belvoir with a somewhat high hand, and brought him back to St. Alban's, he doubtless did so because he knew that at Belvoir he was a square man in a round hole, while in the scriptorium of the abbey he would be in his right place. Certainly the event proved that the Abbot was right, and it was to this judicious removal of a student and man of letters to his proper home that we owe so much of our knowledge of those interesting minutiæ of English history which the writer has revealed. It was under the eye of Roger de Wendover that Matthew Paris grew up, rendering him every year more and more substantial assistance in the library and in the scriptorium.

But the young man was not only a bookworm and

a copyist, he soon got to be looked upon as a prodigy. He was a universal genius; he could do whatever he set his hand to, and better than any one else. He could draw, and paint, and illuminate, and work in metals. Some said he could even construct maps; he was versed in everything, and noticed everything, from "the cedar that is in Lebanon to the hyssop upon the wall;" he was an expert in heraldry; he could tell you about whales, and camels, and buffaloes, and elephants—he could even draw an elephant, illustrate his history, in fact, with the elephant's portrait—the first elephant, he says, that had ever been seen in our northern climes. It was centuries before men had dreamt of what the science of geology would one day reveal. Then, too, he had vast capacity for work, and was a courtly person, and he had the gift of tongues, and had been a great traveller; he had early been sent by the convent to study at the University of Paris, and wherever he went, he was the man to make friends. When the Benedictines in Norway had convinced themselves that there was sore need of a reform of their rule and discipline, they applied to Pope Innocent IV. to send them a Visitor furnished with the necessary authority for carrying out so delicate and difficult a mission; and the Pope made choice of Matthew Paris as the fittest possible

person for such a work. Reluctantly Brother Matthew was compelled to undertake the task: he started on his northern voyage in 1248, and was absent about a year. In Norway he soon grew into high favour with King Hacon, who peradventure would have kept him at his side if he could. This seems to have been the most important episode in his otherwise uneventful life. But the advantages and opportunities which were at the command of any ambitious and studious young monk at St. Alban's were in themselves extraordinary.

We have said that building was always going on. It was going on on a very large scale indeed in Abbot William's time. That means that there were the plans and sections and working drawings to be copied for the architect, and measurements and calculations by the thousand to be made—*a school of architecture*, in short: and besides that, what Roger de Wendover was in the scriptorium, that Walter of Colchester, *pictor et sculptor incomparabilis*, was in the painting room. Walter was a sculptor; indeed he wrought at his marvellous pulpit which the Abbot set up in the middle of the church: and he carved the story of St. Alban upon the great beam over the high altar, and did many another thing of which we have only too brief descriptions. Then, too, there was Richard, the monk who decorated the grand new

guests' hall *deliciose*, as we are told,[1] and who painted pictures and carried out other works of embellishment at a pace which none could have kept up, but that he had his father to help him with his brush, and another artist, John of Wallingford, to carry out his great designs, and many more skilled limners whose names have gone down into silence.

When Abbot William's reign came to an end, the monks were unanimous in choosing John of Hertford as his successor, and the new Abbot lost no time in showing favour to Matthew Paris, Next year Roger de Wendover died, and who could there be so worthy to succeed him as historiographer as the versatile and accomplished brother, who by this time was the boast of the great house? And historiographer accordingly Matthew became — a sort of 13th-century editor of the *Times*; his business was to gather from all points of the compass, if not the latest news, yet the best and most trustworthy reports upon whatever was worth recording. He had his correspondents all over Europe, and that he sifted the evidence as it came to him we know.

Wherever there was any great event that deserved

[1] See an article on "The Wall-paintings in St. Alban's," *Archæological Journal*, vol. xxxix. p. 64; consult too the valuable Appendix F in vol. iii. of Jo. Amundesham's "Annales S Albani."

a place in the Abbey Chronicle, some splendid pageant to describe, some battle, or treaty, or pestilence, or flood, or famine, straightway tidings came to the vigilant historiographer; and there was a comparison of the evidence brought in, and some testing of witnesses, and finally the narrative was drawn up and incorporated into Matthew's history. Again and again it happened that a great personage who, while himself *making* history, was anxious that his own part in a transaction should be represented favourably, would try and get the right side of the famous chronicler, and would furnish him with private information, in other words, such personage was not averse to being interviewed. Even the King himself thought it no scorn to communicate facts and documents to Brother Matthew. Once when Henry saw him in a crowd on a memorable occasion, he picked him out, and bade him take his seat by his side, and see to it that he made a true and faithful report of what was going on; and it is evident that the royal favour he enjoyed through life must have extended to furnishing him with many a story and many a detail which none but the King could have supplied. The minute account of the attempt to assassinate Henry in 1238; the curious State paper giving a narrative of the dispute between the King and his nobles in 1242; the strange scene at the tomb of William

Marshall in 1245, and scores of other incidents in the career of Bishop Grossteste and Richard of Cornwall, were evidently "inspired," and could only have come from eye-witnesses of the events recorded. Nevertheless Matthew, though he was willing enough to receive information, and to utilise facts and documents, was by no means the man to reproduce them exactly in the form in which they came to him. More than once he ventured to remonstrate with the King, and very much oftener than once he expresses his opinion of him in no measured terms. Some of the severest censures he had marked for omission, and some expressions he modified considerably, for we have the good fortune to possess his chronicle both in an earlier and in a later form; but even though the fuller and more outspoken record had perished, we should still have had enough proof to make it clear that we have in Matthew Paris an instance of a born historian, one who never consented to be a mere advocate, taking a side and seeing only half the truth of anything; but a man gifted with the judicial faculty, that precious gift without which a man may be anything you please—a rhetorician, a special pleader, a picturesque writer, a laborious collector of facts; but an historian, never.

And yet Matthew Paris was a magnificent hater, with a fund of indignant scorn and righteous anger

which never fails him upon occasion. Friend of King and nobles as he was, he will not spare his words of wrathful censure upon the tyrant, or upon any that he held deserving of rebuke for cruelty, oppression, and avarice. When he has to lay the lash on such as had proved themselves enemies to his much-loved abbey, or who had wronged and defrauded it, he is well-nigh as fierce as Dante. He singles them out —the doomed wretches—and holds them, as it were, over the fire of hell before he drops them down into the burning flame.

Did Ralph Cheinduit, that blustering, burly knight, cry aloud "A fig for St. Alban and his monks! Since they excommunicated me—look you—I have only increased in girth, behold me fat and jolly, in faith almost too big for my saddle. A fig for them all!" Did he say so? the impious wretch! Be it known that from that very day Sir Knight began to shrink and waste and pine, and if he had not repented and been absolved in time, he had gone down to the bottomless pit with never a hope of deliverance.

Did not Sir Adam Fitz William show the evil spirit that was in him when he sided against us time and again? And now, look to his awful end! Gorged with meat and drink one night, he sprawled upon his bed, *indigestus*, as you may say, and he never woke more. Aye! and he died intestate too. And as

though that was not bad enough, his wife too died, straightway, like another Sapphira slain by the shock of the tidings. And then there was Alan de Beccles, too, always notorious for setting himself against us and our house, he too perished as the other did, for he loved choice dainties overmuch, and he dined late, and he ate as none should eat, and when he could eat no more, suddenly his speech failed him, and his veins burst, smitten with an apoplexy. And many others, whom it would take too long to name, following evil courses, and being persecutors of Holy Alban's Church, perished for ever by God's vengeance.

It is no longer the fashion now to denounce the Pope and his myrmidons, but if the rage of Exeter Hall should ever recur, and the orators of the old platform should revive a taste for anti-papal agitation, they might find in Matthew Paris as rich a repertory of testimonies against Roman aggression and greed as the most rabid Irish Protestant could desire. "O thou Pope," he bursts out once, "thou the father of all the fathers in Christ, how is it that thou sufferest the realms of Christendom to be fouled by such creatures as are thine?" The "creatures" were the papal legates and nuncios and all their belongings, who were plundering England without shame. "Harpies they were and blood-suckers," says Matthew, "mere plunderers, skinning the sheep,

not shearing them only." Then there were the King's Justiciars—"Justice"—nay, with that they had nothing to do. Why tell of their unrighteous deeds? he asks. "Better forbear from vainly writing about the *wrongers*, and return to the story of the wronged."

Of course the friars come in for their share of strong words—chiefly because the Pope made use of them so vilely, and not less because they set themselves above their betters—us, to wit—monks of the old houses.

"They started with such fair professions, they were going to be so very poor, and so very unworldly, and were going to supplement our work and interfere with nobody, and give us all a helping hand. Look at them now!" says Matthew; "they march through the streets in pompous array with banners flaunting in the sun and waxen tapers, and rich burghers in holiday garments joining in the long train, and if they have no land they have money, good store, and as for their churches, they are eclipsing us all. Their invasion of our territory is a dreadful scandal, and they sneer at us and at all other religious men and women, and they flout the parish priests and call them humdrums, and schism is at work horribly, and the people are running away from the old guides, and there is no end to them.

Actually in the year of grace 1257," he says, "a new order of these fellows turned up in London. Friars of the sack, forsooth, because they were clothed in sackcloth! Of course they came armed with a papal licence as usual. What did these fellows come for? Was it to make confusion worse confounded? Alas! alas! If we had only been as we were in the golden age, these friars would never have had a chance—not they! We too are not as the monks of old were; they lived the guileless life—austere, hard, self-denying, saintly! What are we in comparison with them?

"Did not we find the bones of our brethren there, hard by the High Altar, when we were beautifying the same? O ye degenerate sons of this degenerate age! Two centuries ago and our monks were men of faith and prayer. In the year of grace one thousand two hundred and fifty-one, we found more than thirty of them buried together, and their bones were lying there, white and sweet, redolent with the odour of sanctity every one; each man had been buried as he died, in his monastic habit, and his shoes upon his feet too.[1] Aye, and *such* shoes—shoes made for wear and not for wantonness. The soles of these shoes were sound and strong, they might have served the purpose for poor men's naked feet even now, after

[1] Compare "Gesta Abbatum," vol. i. p. 293.

centuries of lying in the grave. Blush ye! ye with your buckles, and your pointed toes and your fiddle faddle. These shoes upon the holy feet that we dug up were as round at the toe as at the heel, and the latchets were all of one piece with the uppers. No rosettes in those days, if you please! They fastened their shoes with a thong, and they wound that thong round their blessed ankles, and they cared not in those holy days whether their shoes were *a pair*. Left foot and right foot each was as the other: and we, when we gazed at the holy relics—we bowed our heads at the edifying sight, and we were dumb-foundered, even to awe, as we swung our censers over the sacred graves of the ages past!"

The anecdotes and out-of-the-way pieces of information in the "Chronica Majora," which may be said to represent the *paragraphs* of modern journalism, are countless. Brother Matthew enlivens his history with these cross-lights at every page, and what gives to these scraps an added charm is that Matthew himself seems to be always with us when he prattles on. Not even Herodotus has succeeded more entirely in impressing his quaint personality upon his narrative. It is always something which he has seen, or heard from some living man who saw it with his own eyes.

"There was my friend John of Basingstoke, had

studied at Paris, and a wonder of learning he was, but he told me himself that his best teacher by far was the young lady Constantina, daughter of an archbishop she. Archbishop of Athens, too—archbishops may marry out there! Before she was twenty she knew all that men may know; she was worth two universities of Paris any day; she foretold the coming of plagues and storms, and eclipses —and—more wonderful still—the coming of earthquakes too: and John of Basingstoke was her scholar, and whatever he knew that was deep and rare, he learnt it of the lady Constantina, the Archbishop's daughter."

Matthew is very great when he has to tell of omens and portents:

"We were scurvily treated by Pope Innocent III.," he says, "in the days of Abbot John. Spite of all our privileges and indulgences, the Pope would have him come to Rome every third year; a sore burden and harm to us all. Forthwith evil omens came. Thrice in three years was our tower struck by lightning. After that wrong of his Holiness it was no wonder that the impression of the papal seal in wax, which we had taken good care to fix on the top of the steeple, availed not to keep off the thunderbolt—small good you see in that kind of thing."

Besides the miscellaneous paragraphs, there are

periodical reports of the weather, and the storms, and the droughts, and the harvests. Moreover, there are what answer to our police reports, and details of criminal proceedings against Jew and Gentile; and births and deaths and marriages; and now and then brief notes upon the state of the markets; and sometimes hints and reflections upon the desirability of certain reforms in Church and State; and all this not in the spirit of modern journalism, which at its best too often bears the marks of haste, and betrays the literary soldier of fortune paid for his work at so much a column, but genuine, hearty; throbbing with a certain passionate loyalty to a tradition or an idea which you may say is exploded, grotesque, or fanciful, but which in the 13th century honest men and devout ones lived by and lived for, and were trying in their own way to carry out into action.

But now that we have got this precious "Chronicle," not to mention other works in the composition of which Brother Matthew had at least a large share—though our space forbids us dwelling upon them or their contents, and we must refer our readers to Dr. Luard's elaborate prefaces if they would desire to know all about them—another question suggests itself, which sooner or later will become a pressing question—What are we going to

do with such a national work of which this country has great reason to be proud?

The days are gone by when a man was supposed to be educated in proportion as he was familiar with the literature of Greece and Rome and ignorant of everything else. Already at Oxford candidates for the highest honours in the final schools think it no shame to read their Plato or their Aristotle in English translations, and in half the time that was needed under the old plan they get a mastery of their Thucydides or Herodotus, devoting themselves to the subject-matter after they have proved at "Moderations" that they have a respectable acquaintance with the language of the authors.

May the day be far off when Homer and Æschylus shall cease to be read in the original! The great writers of Hellas and Italy were poets or orators, great teachers or great thinkers; but they were something more. They were perfect instrumentalists too. Their thoughts, their lessons, their aspirations, their regrets, you may interpret and transfer into the speech and the idioms of the moderns; but the music of their language, the subtleties of melody and rhythm, and harmony and tone, can no more be translated than a symphony for the strings can be adequately represented upon the organ. You may persuade yourself that you have got the substance;

you have missed the perfection of the form. Yet who but a narrow pedant will insist that the study of any literature, ancient or modern, is valuable chiefly for familiarising us with the language, not for enriching our minds with the subject-matter? Do we desire to understand the past and so to be better able to estimate the importance of great movements that are going on in the present or, by the help of the experience of bygone ages, to forecast the future? Then it behoves us to see that our induction shall be made from as wide a view as may be, and to avail ourselves of any light that is to be gained. But it is mere waste of time to be for ever staring at the lamp which may be pretty to look at in itself, but is then most precious when it serves as a means to an end. If we are ever to construct a Science of History, the old methods must give place to something which may approximate to philosophic inquiry.

When we come to think of it, how very small an area of time or space is covered by the historians of Greece and Rome! how small an area and how superficially dealt with! Even Thucydides hardly ventures to lift the veil which separates the civilisation of his own age from that of an earlier period; he lifts it for a moment, then drops the curtain and passes on. It is true indeed that Herodotus introduces us to a world that is not

Hellenic, and brings us into some sort of relation with men whose habits and art and religion had a character of their own; but then these nations were not as we, and not as men of our race could ever become. We never seem to be *in touch* with Egypt or Assyria, and when he prattles on about these nations it is less as an historian than as an observant traveller that Herodotus delights and allures. Xenophon's passing notices of the manners and education, of the *feudalism* and the social life of the Medes, are too brief to be anything but tantalising; but the neglect of Xenophon by professed students is not creditable, however significant. Perhaps of all the Greek writers Polybius was the man who had the truest conception of the historian's vocation; perhaps, too, it was just because he was so much before his age that his voluminous and ambitious work has come down to us little more than a fragment. Because he was something better than a compiler of annals, they who read history only to be amused found him dull, and the moderns have not yet reversed the verdict which was passed upon him. Who ever heard of a candidate for honours taking Polybius into the schools?

It is from the Latin historians that we might have expected so much and from whom we get so little. What do they tell us of ancient Spain—the Spain

that Sertorius pretended he was going to regenerate, and whose civilisation, literature, and national life he did so much to extinguish? If it were not for what Aristotle has told us in the *Politics*, what should we know of that mighty commercial Republic which monopolised the carrying trade of the old world? It never seems to have occurred to Livy that the political organisation of Carthage could be worth his notice. His business was to glorify Rome, and to tell how Rome grew to greatness—grew by war and conquest and pillage, and the ferocious might of her relentless soldiery. The "Germania" of Tacitus stands alone—unique in ancient literature; but what would we not give for such a monograph upon the Britain which Cæsar attempted to conquer, or the Gaul which he plundered and devastated? The great captain's famous missive might be inscribed as the motto of his "Commentaries." *Veni! vidi! vici!* sums up in brief the substance of what they contain. It was always Rome's way! Rome swept a sponge that was soaked in blood over all the past of the nations she subdued. She came to obliterate, never to preserve. Her chroniclers disdained to ask how these or those doughty antagonists had grown formidable, how their national life had developed; whether their progress had been arrested by the

conquerors or whether they had become weak and enervated by social deterioration or moral corruption. Enough that they were *Barbarians*.

The science of history can be but little advanced by writers such as these, who pass from battlefield to battlefield—

> "Crimson-footed, like the stork,
> Through great ruts of slaughter,"

and to whom the silent growth of institutions and the evolution of ethical sentiments and the development of the arts of peace were matters which never presented themselves as worthy of their attention. You may call this History if you will, in truth it is little better than Empiricism. The world is a larger world than Rome or Athens dreamt of, and students of history are beginning to realise that not quite the last thing they have to do is "to look at *home*." Such a work as the "Chronica Majora" of Matthew Paris is a national heritage which it is shameful to allow much longer to be known only by the curious and erudite. Now that there is no excuse for our neglect, is it too much to hope that the day may not be far distant when the name of this great Englishman may become as familiar to schoolboys as that of Sallust or Livy, of Cornelius Nepos or Cæsar—his name as familiar, and his writings better known and more loved?

II.

BURY ST. EDMUNDS.

FROM CENTURY TO CENTURY AT ST. EDMUND'S ABBEY.[1]

WE are assembled this afternoon on the spot where for several hundreds of years the daily life of one of the great English monasteries was carried on. Behind me and to my right rose one of the most magnificent churches in the world. All round us—east, west, north, south—there are still the stupendous ruins of an institution which was slain 350 years ago after a chequered life of nearly nine centuries. It was in the 7th century that Felix the Bur-

[1] An address delivered in the cloisters at Bury St. Edmunds on Friday, July 25, 1884.

gundian came to help the men of faith and prayer who were trying hard to bring the pagans of East Anglia from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. Sigebert, whom men called the learned, was King of East Anglia at that time, and he gave the foreigner so glad a welcome and such a hearty co-operation that Felix became the chief power in the land, and before he grew very old, people from beyond the sea had begun to talk of his wonderful success and to think of him as a new apostle who had some strange secret for winning souls. Among others three Irishmen came to visit Felix, of whom Fursey was chief, and they offered themselves as labourers in the good cause if Felix would but tell them where they must settle and toil. In those days missionaries of the faith of Christ had an entirely different way of setting to work from that which prevails now. We think the only way to make heathen people receive the Gospel is to preach sermons, and to be perpetually arguing and speechifying. We are profoundly convinced that if you can only talk long enough you must win a man over to your way of thinking. In the days of Fursey and Felix—*i.e.*, more than twelve hundred years ago—the leaders of thought and opinion did not believe in *talking*; they did believe in *being* and living! Their view of the wants of the age was—"Ours, at

any rate—

"is not the time
For stringing words with satisfaction;
What's wanted now's the silent rhyme
'Twixt upright will and downright action."

So Felix said to Fursey's company:—

"Go to Bedericsworth, and *show* people what the Gospel is. *Be* Christians. Win over the heathen to the Gospel by the lives you lead and the example you show."

Where we are standing now was Bedericsworth in the old time; and here those men settled—men who were doers and livers, not talkers and preachers; and they ran up half-a-dozen beggarly hovels, and they somehow built something like a church, rudely constructed of the trees that were growing hereabouts; and they set to work to teach the heathen how to gain a livelihood by tilling the soil and using the streams to turn the mill which ground the corn; and they cleared the scrub and stubbed up the old roots; and whereas everybody else was hunting and fishing and quarrelling and fighting, they were men of peace, and, strangest of all, men of prayer. "What's the meaning of it all?" said the heathen people. "Let's try and find out the secret of the strange men; hearken, you Fullan and Ultan, or whatever your odd names are. How do you manage it all? How is it you don't

seem to be afraid of us, and don't want to hurt us or cheat us? Nay, not such bad fellows neither. We can hardly resist the conviction that you are really *good* fellows, and don't want to make anything out of us—positively nothing. What's your secret —speak!" That little band had only one secret, it was an open secret—Jesus Christ and Him crucified. They pointed to the cross and the Lord that hung on it. The secret? There!

These first colonisers were the first monks of Bury, and King Sigebert joined them—became one of them. These monks kept up a devout life here, and there is good reason to believe they prospered, and that for two hundred years or so they were the quiet teachers and educators of the rude Suffolk people, doing good work without much show or profession till the terrible Danes came and settled in East Anglia. The Danes had been dropping in upon the Norfolk and Suffolk coast for many years before; but it was not till 867 that they made any settlement here; that year they passed their first winter among us. Edmund, whom men call St. Edmund, was the King of East Anglia at that time. It may be that the monks of Bedericsworth had taught him. He was certainly a Christian; as a Christian he took up arms against the Danish marauders, fought a battle somewhere hereabouts, was beaten

and slaughtered, as I need not tell. The Danes were furiously set against the Christians. I think that the death of St. Edmund points to the fact that his war with the Northern pirates was to some extent a religious war, and that when the Danes gained the day they set to work to put down all the strongholds of the Christian religion in the land. It is not unlikely that during the two hundred years that had passed since King Sigebert's days, Bedericsworth had grown to be a place of note in the little kingdom, and that the monastery on this very spot had become a place capable of defence, as so many monasteries were in the rude times. But the Danes carried all before them; they stormed one religious house after another, slew the monks, burnt the houses and reduced the churches to ruins. This was the first suppression of the monasteries in East Anglia.

For the next hundred years the spot on which we stand must have presented on a small scale pretty much the same appearance that it does now on a large scale—*i.e.*, the ground must have been strewn with ruins—ruins incomparably less imposing, however, and less extensive than these. Then it would appear that there was a revival of the ascetic spirit and a revival of the desire to live the higher life in communities. And, accordingly, at the beginning of the 11th century some well-meaning clergy

bound themselves together by solemn engagements to govern their daily lives by a certain *rule*, and to submit to the discipline of that rule in all things that the rule prescribed. The Greek word for rule is *canon*, and these good men, because they lived by their rule, got to be called *Canonici*, or men of rules; and gradually the word *Canonici* got changed into the more common everyday word of Canon. These Canons somehow got back to the old buildings here, but the Canons took to themselves wives, and hence houses rose up and babies and children playing about the ruins and toddling between the canonical and paternal legs as the devout Canons went to worship the Almighty Father and the Virgin Mother, and the adorable Son, in the church that had been patched up, restored, roofed over, and beautified once more. These Canons lived almost exactly as the Canons of Ely and Norwich do in the cathedral closes at this moment. Perhaps not *quite* as comfortably, not quite as grandly; but live as they might, they were fathers of families, and the old awe and halo that surrounded the monastery—when all the inmates were unmarried, and as it were lifted up into a region where the cares and troubles of family life were unknown—*that* had somehow faded, almost vanished. No man is a hero to his *valet-de-chambre*, and no man is a monk with a wife and children.

Moreover, the feeling of the times was against clergymen being married; but most strongly and increasingly was the feeling of the times against Canons being married. "Men of rule?"—people thought; "Nay! Nay! Nay! You'll never make us believe that men will keep rules and live by rules when they have wives; the wives would have a word to say in that matter!" It ended by the Canons being turned out. They were voted a sham and pretence: they had no business here. They had to go! The great King Cnut was ruler of England now; yes, and Master of Scotland, and of Norway and Denmark too. King Cnut favoured monks—he by no means believed in the half-and-half gentlemen, the married Canons, neither fish nor flesh, under petticoat government. King Cnut had founded the great Abbey of St. Benet's Hulm in the stagnant swamps—dreary, cold, damp, and aguish among the Norfolk Broads. The very horribleness of the place—lonely and dismal now, worse than lonely and dismal then—instead of repelling men of faith and prayer, attracted them. Let me again remind you that the *raison d'être* of the monk was not teaching and preaching, but living. They were to show forth the Lord's life. Preaching the Lord's truth—that they left to others; it was not their main object, it was not what they had to do; they had to live the

Gospel according to their light, according to the rule laid down for them by their founder.

The Abbey of St. Benet's filled at a suprising rate. King Cnut gave the word. The Canons of Bury St. Edmund's were ejected, and a colony of twelve monks from St. Benet's took their places; and here they settled nearly a century and a half after the first suppression of the monasteries, a Danish king having been the instrument for restoring the conventual life to the same spot from whence his Danish predecessors had driven the monks out and made havoc of them six or seven generations before. Thus the Abbey of St. Edmund's sprang into being, renewed its life, or began a second life, the monks being associated under the rule of St. Benedict, and living here in common with large endowments to support them, and planted in this spot with this mission before them, to set forth by their daily and hourly life an example of Christian devotion, sobriety, and self-denial, and helped thereto, so far as human sagacity, wisdom, and foresight could be of any avail, by being subject to a code of laws and a system of discipline which would have kept them from the power of evil and out of the reach of temptation if—oh! those *ifs*—if only men were docile as little children without passions and vices bred in the bone and therefore sure to come out

in the flesh; if—if—if those well-intentioned and, let us hope, earnest and sincere enthusiasts had *not* been flesh and blood—had not been in fact—men.

But leaving this, let us come back to the fact that it was King Cnut, the sovereign of England, Norway, and Denmark, who was the founder of this great Abbey of St. Edmund half a century before the Norman Conquest, and that it was he who settled monks once more in the old spot after the first suppression of the monasteries in East Anglia. But when the abbey made a new start the monks who came here were an improvement upon those who had formerly been driven out. These new men lived under a new and improved rule of discipline, and that rule was the rule of St. Benedict. This is not the time or place for saying much upon the subject of the monastic rules. It is a difficult subject, and one which though interesting and instructive I must needs pass by on this occasion. Only this must be borne in mind: that the Benedictine monks were like their predecessors united in a corporation, with the professed object of displaying to the world an example of a simpler, more pure, more self-denying, and more devout life than it was supposed possible to lead whilst men were buying and selling, and scheming, and intriguing, and fighting, and rioting in the market, and the shop, and the camp, and

while they were thinking only of bringing up their families and winning honours and hoarding money to leave behind them. These monks I doubt not began well, their daily life was passed in this spot. Here was their cloister.

The cloister was a quadrangle, whose outer walls you may easily trace from where we are now standing. It is pretty certain that at no very great expense the rubbish and *débris* might be easily removed, and the old walks of the cloister be laid bare; and, if it were, this spot would be made at once incomparably more impressive and incomparably more beautiful than it is. You will find that from ten to twelve feet inside the outer wall ran an arcade, the walls of which were some feet lower than the outside wall of the cloister, and between those two walls stretched a roof that covered the space between. This arcade in King Cnut's days was open to the air, but long before the last great spoliation of the religious houses, it had been glazed throughout, and almost certainly glazed with the most glorious stained-glass windows. The four sides of this arcade, or cloister, were used for different purposes. In one of the walks the school was held, and I think it very probable that if such removal of the rubbish as I have hinted at were made, you would find here, as you may see at Westminster

Abbey and at Norwich, not only the stone cupboards, in which the school books were kept, but the marks of the boys' games actually remaining on the stone benches and the pavement. Yes! it is quite certain that little boys in the monastery schools played at marbles, and were in the habit of working holes into the solid stone when the monks' backs were turned, and leaving their marks behind them. The square space in the middle was called the garth; it was usually a grass plot open to the air, and I think it probable that you would find the remains of a fountain there, or at any rate, of a large well. And there is some reason to believe that here, at times, a peacock might be seen and heard, or other tame birds were kept, and storks and ravens would come and perch and peer, looking serious and thoughtful.

Here, as I have said, pacing round the cloister, living their life in it, the monks pursued their avocations — studied, taught, mused, and sometimes quarrelled. Behind us there rose the church; in King Cnut's days a very different structure from that the ruins of which still remain—looking so gaunt and dreary. When that church stood up in its glory it was 100 ft. longer than Norwich Cathedral, and 20 ft. longer than York, and only 9 ft. short of Canterbury. For ages kings had been its nursing fathers and queens its nursing mothers. In splendour and

renown it was not only the glory of East Anglia, and her boast and pride, but one of the wonders of England. Nay, one of the wonders of the world. Excavation there too would be pretty sure to result in some surprising *discoveries*. I use that word advisedly. It would be easy, for instance—to go no farther—to lay open the old crypt under the shrine of St. Edmund, which probably remains very little damaged. I think it probable that that crypt would be found intact at the present hour, and that it would be a mere question of the cost of spade labour to determine how much the whole expense of such an experiment would amount to.

I dare not take up your time by pointing out the site of the various buildings of the monastery. It must suffice if I notice one or two of them very slightly. I must, however, draw your attention to the fact that the position of the conventual buildings at St. Edmund's Abbey is abnormal. The cloister and the other ordinary and indispensable monastic buildings that were clustered round it are, as a rule, to be found to the south of the church—*i.e.*, exposed as much as possible to the sun. Here they are as you see to the north, and they must have been very cold, dark, and cheerless. Why they were so placed in this instance I am unable to explain. But I think the theory of Mr. Gordon Hills, alluded to in Mr.

Morant's paper, does not afford a satisfactory explanation in this instance. I say, *I think*, for it is possible that a more careful examination of the facts than I have been able to bestow, as yet, might convert me. There was sure to be some good reason for departing from the usual practice, and the lie of the land, or the course of the streams, or some other cause may be found to explain the fact. A local antiquary, who is familiar with the site and whose eye has had the requisite training, would probably be able to make it all clear to us.

There were two entries from the cloister to the church, one to my right, the other to my left. Parallel with the church, abutting on the north wall of the cloister, and of the same length with it, rose the refectory, or great dining-hall. Yonder to my right stood the Chapter-house, in which the whole conven met every morning to talk over their plans for the day that was coming, and to discuss questions of business that were always calling for attention. At right angles with the refectory, and probably built over an undercroft or vaulted storehouse, was the dormitory or common bedchamber of the monks, of the stone staircase communicating with which I think you would find fragments hard by the north-east angle of the cloister and abutting on the outer wall of the Chapter-house.

Fifty years after King Cnut's days came the Norman Conquest, by which, from all that appears, the abbey gained rather than lost—gained in wealth and power, I mean—whether it gained in anything else, whether the dwellers in these walls, abbot and monks, were better or worse than King Cnut's earlier Benedictines is quite another question. One thing is certain that about one hundred and fifty years after the Conquest the Abbey of St. Edmund's was in a very bad way indeed. The convent was horribly in debt, and not only in debt but something very like absolutely insolvent. There had been a great deal of gross mismanagement on the part of incompetent abbots and other officials, who were bad men of business; and that process which the moderns call "flying kites"—getting advances at a usurious rate of interest—had been carried on to an extent which it is hideous to read of. The money-lenders in those days all over England were the Jews, and the Jews had got such a hold upon the estates of the abbey, and its rents were so heavily mortgaged that they had actually entered upon the monastic buildings and taken possession, and were actually living there with their wives and children. The monks being, it is to be supposed, almost in a state of siege, kept within the four walls of this cloister and the church, the Jews frolicking about

among the gardens and the buildings yonder; little Jew boys, with hooky noses, crying to my Lord Abbot, "Go up, thou baldhead!" and little Jew girls, with the dark, inscrutable eyes, peeping round the corner at the prior, consumed with vexation, anxiety, and shame—peeping at him, giggling, and running away with a scream of scorn. What would have come to pass if, in the providence of God, a great man had not been raised up in the person of Abbot Sampson it is very hard to say, for instances are not uncommon of a religious house getting deeply into debt and being actually compelled to sell up its property and vanish from the face of the earth. If there had been no Abbot Sampson or no one like him at that very critical time the subsequent history of this great house would have been very different from what it really was.

Abbot Sampson, who ruled over St. Edmund's Abbey for thirty-three years, was one of earth's great ones in an evil time. He came to the rescue of his house, and managed its affairs so well that the Jews were speedily sent to the rightabout. I earnestly hope he was in no way answerable for the savage massacre of fifty-seven of them on the 23rd of March, 1190, in the streets of Bury by some furious and bloodthirsty ruffians who called themselves Crusaders. I hope he and his monks were

ashamed and horrified at that wicked slaughter. I hope it was before that that the abbey was swept clean of Jews, debts paid, rents recovered, discipline restored, abuses removed; certainly from this time it went on prospering hugely. If you would learn more about Abbot Sampson and his doings read the first half of Carlyle's *Past and Present*, which contains passages of extraordinary force and pictures of the life of the time which will repay some hours of study; though if you can manage to get through the rhodomontade of the latter half of the book you will achieve more than some of us have been able to accomplish.

Abbot Sampson died in 1212. He did not live to take part in the anxious struggles which ended with the signing of Magna Charta. I forbear to dwell upon that and upon the meeting of the Barons on the other side of the wall there when the Charter of Henry I. was produced, and they swore to stand by one another in defence of their rights and liberties. Twenty years after Abbot Sampson's death the preaching friars tried to settle in Bury. In fact they did settle there and remained for years; they had to go at last, however; but that is too long a story to tell. In 1257 there were fearful floods hereabouts, and after the floods a famine and then a pestilence, and more than two thousand poor creatures died at

Bury in the year and were buried in the cemetery yonder. Six years after this when there was war between the Barons and Henry III., Simon, Bishop of Norwich, who had taken the wrong side, had to flee for his life, and found refuge here from the anger of the Baronage, and three years later the party of the *Disinherited* turned this abbey into a stronghold, and it was the last great fortress that held out against the Royal arms. For this the abbey was heavily fined, and the townsmen outside suffered only a less severe impost. Five years later, in August, 1272, Henry III. died within these walls. Twenty-four years afterwards—viz., on the 1st of March, 1296—Edward I., on his return from Scotland, held a Parliament here. The Barons and Burghers voted a subsidy. The clergy, under the advice of Archbishop Winchelsey, refused to contribute anything. It was one of the minor crises in English history, on the significance and the consequences of which I may not dwell.

Pass over another thirty years and we come upon another crisis. Queen Isabella, the consort of Edward II., and mother of Edward III., landed at Harwich on the 24th of September, 1326, with a force of foreign mercenaries, with the avowed purpose of thrusting her husband from the throne. She, her army, and her supporters rested here for a while—the abbey

doubtless being thronged by the great ones, the town swarming with the rank and file of that invading force, which carried all before it. It was a time of bad government, almost of universal anarchy. The townsmen of Bury outside had been getting more and more powerful, the religious houses had not been growing more popular. I doubt whether the townsmen were only the oppressed, aggrieved, and plundered people whom Mr. Green represents them to have been.[1] They had got to feel their strength, and at Bury they had just had a very impressive lesson in the arts of revolt, and seen the example which the Queen and her paramour had given them. When queens and nobles threw off the yoke and robbed people of their lands and possessions, pillaged, and slew in defiance of law, why should not we, the middle-class townsmen, do the same? Rebellion was "in the air," so the townsmen of Bury rebelled against the Lord Abbot. The mob looted the place; they robbed and burnt and destroyed, and one curious and very significant incident in the affair deserves to be specially noted—viz., that among the leaders of the riotous multitude there were country parsons not a few. Why is that so significant?

[1] See "Stray Studies from England and Italy," by J. R. Green, p. 196. Macmillan, 1892.

1. Because it reminds us that there was not then, and never was before or since, any cordiality between the country parsons and the religious orders. There never was a time when the monks did not treat the country parsons with just the sort of supercilious condescension which Fellows of colleges showed towards them a few years ago and still continue to show in our own days. Until a man has got rid of the delusion that monks built parish churches and served them and were working clergy, he will never be able to understand English history.

2. This incident shows that at this time the country parsons were the people's friends and natural leaders. Said the poor rustics to the parson, "You have been wronged as well as we. The abbey has robbed your tithes and appropriated them, and spends them for its own glorification. You have cause for quarrel, so have we. Put yourself at our head. If thou wilt go with us we will go, and if thou wilt not go with us we will not go." Said the parsons, "We will go;" and they went!

3. It shows us how by this time the monasteries had already lost a great deal of their old *religious* character, they were regarded now as governed by a *Lord* Abbot; and there was more of the lord than anything else; while in the course of time the

convent had come to be regarded as little more than a corporation that held lands in every parish and had powers without limit. The secular duties, the business relations that brought the monks face to face with the people, had come more and more into prominence; the religious character of the institution and of its members had faded.

All this comes out more and more strikingly as time goes on. The great agrarian revolt of 1381 burst upon this abbey with tremendous force. The leader in Suffolk was one John Wrawe, whom you must please *not* to confound with Jack *Strawe*. One of the chief victims of the violence of the rebels was the Prior of St. Edmund's Abbey. That is an ugly story, but it has two sides to it, and now must be passed over very lightly. Twelve years after that tragedy there came again great storms and floods upon the eastern counties, and in October, 1393, so great a deluge visited these parts that the water rose even to the level of where we are now standing, and the church was flooded from end to end. . . .

And now I must make a leap over the intervening period, about which perhaps it is as well that not too much should be inquired. Looking round about us to-day and seeing as far as the eye can reach traces of ancient grandeur, the handiwork of a mighty corporation, which, on the whole, exercised

an influence at once elevating and beneficent—in our sentimental moods we are inclined to indulge in idle regrets and more idle longings for the days that were. The final catastrophe which came so suddenly at last was attended with unexampled outrages and unexampled injustice and wrong. There was nothing wanting to make the cup of bitterness as bitter as it could be made. But the catastrophe was inevitable. Like one of those enormous trees which you may see in a primæval forest, this great abbey had been spreading forth its branches far and wide, not helping other things to grow, but keeping them down. It overshadowed the land. It had thrust its roots so deep into the ground of things that it was living at the expense of the life of every other institution with which it came into relation. Nay, it had become a brainless, heartless organism—there was no speculation in its eyes, the soul of it was gone.

And yet when the axe was laid to the root of the tree it had never looked more magnificent. Leland the antiquary saw St. Edmund's Abbey in its splendour only a very short time before it ceased to be—it was a vision to awe a man, almost to overwhelm him. "The sun hath not shone on a goodlier abbey," he says, "whether a man indifferently consider either the endowment with revenues, or the

largeness or the incomparable magnificence thereof. He that saw it would say, verily it was a city, so many gates there are in it, and some of brass, and so many towers, and a most stately church, upon which attend three others also, standing gloriously in one and the same churchyard, all of passing fine and curious workmanship." And yet it was the glory and the splendour of art, not of life. Leland saw eighty stalls in that astonishing choir—eighty stalls in which none but monks might take their seats. Not fifty of them were filled. When the Act of Parliament was passed for dissolving the monasteries there were only sixty-two monks here all told, and only forty-nine signed the surrender of the estates to the King. But how different these monks were from the devotees who had settled here in the waste lands centuries before! *They* were men of prayer, or they were nothing. They could leave to posterity their churches and lands and buildings; they could not leave their spirit to those that came after. The later monks kept fifteen chaplains—note that!—to perform the daily services for them by deputy, and they kept forty or fifty clergymen to officiate in the churches and chapels outside and to do the routine work which could be done by any one, and did not require so important a person as a professed monk of St. Edmund's Abbey to trouble himself with.

The monk was a dead man, because he had ceased to have any duties. The despised country parson survived and still lives on, and will live on because he is not a mere useless burden upon God's earth!

And so this place was doomed. All the splendour and the pomp has passed away; the treasures and the jewels and the gold were scrambled for by ruffians, wasted upon debauchery and riot. It could not be helped, perhaps. Earthquakes have their use, and hurricanes do some work in the economy of nature, and the eruption of the volcano casts up the dust of continents to be. And so it is in the other world—the social world, if I may so call it—where the *strata* are for ever subject to pressure, subsidence, upheaval, ceaseless change. There, too, the old order is for ever changing. It may be that some of us would like just for one hour to find ourselves back in the prehistoric time—say among the men of the drift chipping at their flint weapons, clicking in their rudimentary language, sucking the marrow from the bones of elks and bears—or for one hour to watch the monstrous saurians crawling with enormous bulk among the gigantic reeds and sedge; and see the mastodons floundering, munching, wallowing yonder, where the tiny Linnet trickles now; or catch a sight for one hour of Nature in her giant forms. But no! We cannot put back the clock, which will

move on. Dragons of the prime that tare each other in their slime, were dragons after all. Magnificent, awful, but still dragons. The past is gone. It has left us some things to regret, some things we would fain recover, if so it might be—some things for the which we think we should be the better if we could have them now; but the great law of progress, with its irresistible force, pushes us onwards, admits of no loitering, forbids all going back. Better surrender ourselves consciously and reverently to the necessity that is laid upon us; and instead of lamenting the past on the one hand, or ignorantly declaiming against it as nothing worth on the other, better try to use such light as it may have to give us, and walk by that light as wisely as we may:—

> "Dead and gone is the old world's ideal,
> The old arts and old religions fled;
> But I gladly live amid the real,
> And I seek a worthier ideal—
> Courage, brothers—God is overhead!'

III.

ON THE EDGE OF THE NORFOLK HOLY LAND.

THE river Nar, or Setchy, takes its rise in the parish of Litcham, and pursuing a somewhat tortuous course of about thirty miles, finds its way at last into the Ouse at Lynn. It is probable that during that remote period when the vast earthworks which astonish the visitor at Castleacre were first undertaken, the little river was navigable for galleys or barges of small draught of water, and probable, too, that the stone of the mediæval castle and of the glorious priory, whose ruins still bear witness to its former importance, may have been brought up the river from some distant Lincolnshire quarry without the necessity of any land carriage to increase the labour and the cost. Even in comparatively modern times the Nar was navigable as far as Narborough,

where in our days the church stands just fifty feet above the level of the sea, from which as the crow flies it is scarcely ten miles distant, though the sluggish stream winds for nearly twice ten miles before it loses itself in the salt water.

Fed by three streamlets which, in their ordinary course, trickle lazily down from the high ground of East Walton on the north, and confined on the south by what we in Norfolk may venture courteously to call the table-land of Tottenhill, Shouldham, and Marham, the valley of the Nar from Narborough to Lynn must have been for ages a desolate swamp liable to be inundated for months at a time, and in the condition in which the Norfolk broads are at this moment, except that the enormous flocks of birds that frequented the lonely meres were then undisturbed by human creatures who love to be noisy slaughterers of all that can "fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." At the edge of this forbidding region as time went on men settled, and made their habitations. It seems that when the Norsemen came and found homes among us, the valley of the Nar fell almost entirely into the hands of powerful Danish magnates—Hacon the Dane was the great man at Pentney, Turkil at Shouldham, Turketil—if he were not identical with the other — at Wormegay and Tottenhill, while

Marham had come to be a possession of the great religious house of Ely, having not improbably been bestowed upon that monastery by King Cnut himself. But their manors or townships all lay at the edge of the vast swamp that filled the valley of the Nar. Sometimes the marshes were valuable for cattle to lie on; sometimes the stagnant morasses were very productive of eels, or great pike were speared, or the plovers' nests were rifled for their eggs, or the wild ducks coming in flocks found the tall reeds a treacherous resting-place, when the craft of man was set at work to satisfy the cravings of his maw. But in the main the valley was waste land, and the villages, or towns, as they called them, lay away from the low swamp. On the heights beyond these the people were gathered, and tilled the soil, and lived as tillers of the soil were wont to live, and as they are likely to live to the end of the world. When the Norman Conquest came the people in this district were as well off perhaps as other people were in the rural districts, and as far as church accommodation goes they were a great deal better off than they are now. The churches at Wormegay, Tottenhill, and Pentney are mentioned in the great survey. Pentney had thirty acres of glebe, and at Shouldham there were actually two churches with seventy-three acres of glebe between

them. The church at Marham is not noticed, but there almost certainly was one there too. In every single instance these churches have been, if not disestablished, yet long since disendowed. Thereby hangs a tale, which this is not the time or place to tell.

Without being at all able to prove it, and without having intention on the present occasion of giving the reasons for saying so, I yet must express my suspicion that the Norman Conquest and the expulsion of the Danish landowners from their estates and the handing over of the said estates to the Conqueror's followers, acted very disastrously in this district, socially, economically, and religiously. I suspect that the villages were to a very great extent deserted—the land untilled, the clergy starved out, the churches sorely decayed. I suspect that things went from bad to worse, and that they got to their very worst when Stephen was called King. Nevertheless it is certain that in little more than a century after the death of the Conqueror—*i.e.*, in less time than has passed since the accession of George III.; in less time than has passed since some of our grandfathers were born—the valley of the Nar had become the Holy Land of Norfolk.

Let me explain what I mean by calling this district a Holy Land. I mean that following the

course of the Nar downwards, through all its windings for some twenty-five or thirty miles from Castleacre, there were at least nine religious houses, no one of which was five miles distant from the stream—houses, every one of which was characterised by extensive buildings of more or less splendour and magnificence, and occupied by societies of men or women living in communities which were governed according to a certain rule or constitution prescribing to the several members of the community the minutest rules of conduct and the most searching details of discipline for every day and every hour of their lives; rules which the several members bound themselves by the most solemn engagements to observe, without subterfuge, without murmur, to their dying day. The professed object aimed at by these societies and believed to be facilitated by the discipline they were pledged to submit to, was the attainment of a higher ideal of duty, a more devout and aspiring habit of mind, and a loftier, purer, and nobler life than was supposed to be at all possible while men were breathing the atmosphere of coarseness and violence and covetousness and passion, with which the work-day world and all worldly society was assumed to be saturated.

The belief that the world could never be really

reformed, and that if a man or woman wished to live a virtuous, holy life there was no other way of doing so than by retiring from that world and sheltering himself or herself from all contact with it, I have little to say in excuse of. But it is undeniable that such a belief had obtained a profound hold of people's minds in the 11th and 12th centuries, and that through the length and breadth of England that belief produced a profound impression upon our forefathers and led to such prodigious sacrifices on the part of the rich and powerful, as very materially to affect the history of this country.

At the time of the Conquest—speaking without any attempt at precise accuracy on a subject of some obscurity—there may be said to have been only two classes of religious houses—(1) those which were tenanted by Benedictine monks living under the rule of St. Benedict, and (2) those which were occupied by Regular Canons, whose rule was much less strict and severe than the other. Considerable jealousy had long existed between the two religious bodies. The "old connection" of the Benedictines had suffered of late a serious schism, and the new connection or Reformed Benedictines were now represented by the Cluniac monks, for whom the vast priory of Lewes was founded about

twenty years after the Conquest, and of this great priory the Castleacre monastery was a *cell*. That is, it was a house affiliated to the mother house, as a branch of a great commercial house in Bombay might be connected with the original firm settled in London. Of the history of Castleacre a great deal might be discovered by any one having the time to make a study of its registers, one of which is in the British Museum. What may be called the Benedictine of the "old connection" was represented in this district by the nunnery of Blackborough in the parish of Middleton and by that alone.

The Regular Canons were represented by the occupants of the once splendid house of Pentney, and we have assembled here this morning to attempt in some small measure to throw ourselves back into the past and to recall from oblivion some of that busy and earnest life which for at least three centuries went on hereabouts where we are standing. We have passed through that magnificent gatehouse which in its desolation and decay still witnesses to the grandeur of the days gone by. We can still easily trace the line of the wall which ran from this gatehouse to the stream which turned the priory mill; but the monastic buildings, and the splendid church, and the dwellings of the servants and

labourers, and the school where the children were taught, and the cloister in which the Canons' private life was passed — these have all perished. The foundations might be easily laid bare, and the original plan and arrangements of the conventual buildings be exposed at a trifling expense; but there is not one stone left upon another and the harvest has just been garnered from the soil which 300 years ago was covered with such triumphs of architecture as would put all our nineteenth-century attempts to shame.

Though I cannot act as showman and point out the site of this building or of that which would give a certain point and interest to our meeting here, yet I trust some substitute for such a scrutiny as we cannot hope to make may be accepted in the shape of a very brief review of some scenes in the history of Pentney Priory, which I think will be new to most of you present. Before I begin, however, let us take a slight survey of the ground.

Due west of where we stand, and about two miles off, situated on the edge of what was then a swamp, the little Priory of Augustinian Canons of Wormegay was founded about the year 1190 by one of the Earls of Warenne. It was one of the many religious houses that started in a very ambitious way, and early overbuilt themselves. It dragged

on an unsatisfactory existence for some 250 years, and then, becoming hopelessly insolvent, was abolished, and its encumbered estates were taken over by this Priory of Pentney. Three or four miles further to the west the Nunnery of Crabhouse, in Wiggenhall St. Mary, was founded about 100 years after Wormegay. The original site is described as a "solitary place or desert," which was given to the poor women who settled there because it was worth nobody else's having. In process of time the nunnery became a flourishing institution, and in the 15th century Joan de Wiggenhall, being prioress of the house, caused large sums to be spent upon the buildings, of which a long and curiously minute description remains for some ambitious Norfolk antiquary to transcribe and print for the benefit and instruction of us all.[1]

To the south-east yonder, about two miles as the crow flies, was the Cistercian Nunnery of Marham ; and a mile or two to the west of that the curious Monastery of Shouldham—curious, *i.e.*, to Norfolk men, because it was the only house of the Gilbertine order in East Anglia, and because the Gilbertine was the only purely English order, and

[1] Since this address was given it has been transcribed and contributed, by Miss M. Bateson, to the ninth vol. of the "Journal of the Norfolk and Norwich Archæological Society."

because its rule had some provisions of a very peculiar character on which I have not now the time to dwell. All these four monasteries were situated on the left bank of the Nar, and all on the edge of the morass that I have before alluded to, and all within a radius of six miles of where we are now standing. To the north-west of us on the right bank—*i.e.*, on the same side of the river as Pentney—it seems that some members of the Scales family had intended to found a Gilbertine house in the parish of Middleton, possibly during the lifetime of St. Gilbert; but the scheme did not succeed, and in the next generation the intention of the founder was carried out in a different way by the setting up the Benedictine Nunnery of Blackborough, which flourished exceedingly as time went on and became eventually one of the richest nunneries in East Anglia.

Let us now return to Pentney. When Hacon the Dane was evicted from his estates hereabouts by the Conqueror, those estates were handed over to the great warrior, Roger Bigot. The Pentney estate (to use a modern expression) extended as far as East Walton, and seems to have included all the marshes as far as Narford. It was a considerable territory, and, Hacon being expelled, Robert de Vals, as he is called in the survey, or Robert de Vaux, or Robert de Vallibus, as he has been else-

where called, was put in his place as sub-tenant to the great Roger Bigot and his heirs. Robert de Vaux being, as he was, one of the greatest men in Norfolk, was an absentee landlord, and being affected by the then prevalent enthusiasm in favour of the monastic bodies, made over his Pentney estate for the founding of this priory towards the end of the 11th century or beginning of the 12th; the Canons were to pray for his soul and the soul of his wife, Sibilla, and as far as can be made out for the souls of his son John and *his* wife Avelina. But there seems to have been some little informality in the surrender of the property, and it was afterwards alleged that Robert de Vaux had not obtained from Roger Bigot a confirmation of his grant, which was therefore void.

From this irregularity (if it were well founded) arose great troubles to the Pentney Canons; and when their priory had been built with more or less magnificence, and their church had been duly served, and the value of the estate enormously increased by their good farming, and they had become already a power in the country and a blessing to this neighbourhood; and Roger Bigot had been dead some years, and Robert de Vaux and his wife were dead too, and under the nominal rule of King Stephen all was anarchy and confusion and robbery; Hugh Bigot, son of Roger, suddenly laid

claim to the whole Pentney estate, churches and conventual buildings and houses and lands, and took forcible possession, and drove the Canons out. The pretext for this outrage was that the estates had been forfeited to the overlord for want of his confirmation having been obtained, and there is good reason for believing that William de Vaux, another son of the founder, who had succeeded to the inheritance of his elder brother, was more than a consenting party to the attempted robbery—the two worthies having made an agreement, more or less precise, to share the plunder which they hoped to gain. There was no law in England then—no, nothing that deserved the name of law or justice; the only hope of redress for any one—and that only was to be had by the clergy, who were a privileged class—was by an appeal to Rome. The prior of Pentney at this time was named Geoffrey, and that is about all I know of him. He seems to have acted with some decision and promptness, and to have started at once to lay the matter before the Pope's Court, the great court of appeal for all Europe at this time. The case must have come on for hearing about 1155, and when Adrian IV., the only Englishman who ever held the Papacy, presided over the Roman see, and it was decided in favour of the Prior and Convent of Pentney.

It was one thing, however, in those days for an injured party to get a verdict in his favour, and quite another for him to get possession of his property. Hugh Bigot and William de Vaux defied the Pope and the Canons, and seem to have kept possession of Pentney and its belongings for at least ten or a dozen years, and if it had not been for the iron will and irresistible pertinacity of Thomas à Becket they never would have recovered their hold on the monastery and its possessions which they clung to so long.

Matters, however, came to a crisis a little before Becket's murder by the boldness of William Turbe, Bishop of Norwich, in publicly excommunicating the two lordly robbers in the cathedral; and this, followed as it was by the scare that ensued upon Becket's murder, brought the two worthies to their senses. The lands and buildings were restored, the Canons, reduced to six in number with their prior, were reinstated in their monastery, and, rendering good for evil, they offered up prayers day by day for the souls of the founder Robert and his wife, and that founder's son, John de Vaux, and the Lady Avelina; but whether they also forgave the evil-minded William de Vaux and prayed for him and his I am unable to say. After this it is to be presumed that the Canons of Pentney and their

successors for many generations went on in a quiet and inoffensive way adding to the grandeur of their monastery and the splendour of their church, and farming their lands and keeping their school and being considerable personages in the neighbourhood.

One by one other religious houses rose up around them—those, viz., that I have named before—the parish parsons were fleeced systematically, and in the place of the old rectors succeeded the late vicars, with just enough stipend to keep body and soul together; and unless there had been such things as Easter offerings, and free-will offerings, and fees for masses and burials and the like, the poor human sheep of the wilderness would have been in a sorry plight, for a monastery seldom acknowledged any duty in the shape of a cure of souls.

There is nevertheless strong proof that the Canons of Pentney through their whole history retained the confidence and esteem of the district round. This evidence is twofold. The indirect evidence is that which is afforded by the continual and uninterrupted flow of small benefactions which came to them for three hundred years. This may be traced pretty well in the list of benefactors to be found in Blomefield and in Taylor's "Index Monasticus," and it might be traced much more minutely and much more satisfactorily if the present possessor of

the Cartulary, which the editors of the "Monasticon" were permitted to use and extract from in 1830, could be induced to make it available for research now. Unhappily that Cartulary is no longer accessible to the student. When we come to the direct evidence of the character borne by the Pentney Canons as time went on, it must be premised that we must be thankful for *any* light thrown upon such a subject as this, after the clean sweep that has been made of all documents belonging to the see of Norwich, excepting the Institution books; and on the face of that scandalous obliteration of the materials of history we can expect but few and very fragmentary notices of the condition of the monasteries. Nevertheless, there are some scraps of information, and in every single case, as far as they go, they are in favour of this monastery.

Fifty years or so after the affair of Hugh Bigot and William de Vaux, Archbishop Peckham made a visitation of a peculiarly strict and searching character through the religious houses of this Norwich diocese. Peckham was a most vehement and uncompromising reformer. He entered the diocese in the middle of November, 1280, and made a strict visitation of Wymondham Priory first; from Wymondham he went on to Norwich, taking up his quarters at the Bishop's residence at

Thorpe. He found that the nuns of Carrow had been defrauded; he did them justice and got them their dues. He came down upon the Priory of Coxford like a school inspector upon a board school, and lectured them roundly for their worldliness and frivolous lives. On January 5, 1281, he visited the abbey of North Creak, found things going on wrong, and forthwith compelled the abbot to resign. On the 8th of January he was at Docking, and an attempt was made to resist his archiepiscopal authority. Peckham stamped it down with promptness, and the revolters were frightened into obsequious silence. On the 15th of January he was at Castleacre; there he was on the edge of the Norfolk Holy Land. Five days were occupied in visiting the district. Marham Nunnery had only just been begun, and its foundress was buried there next year. But with Pentney and the Canons there no fault could be found. I have no doubt that the day will come when further evidence will be forthcoming from sources as yet unsearched, but in the meantime we must be content to skip over the period of two centuries till we arrive at 1492, when Bishop Goldwell made his Visitation of this diocese —a record of which still remains. It is a most valuable document, and gives a minute account of the religious houses in Norfolk and Suffolk in the

fifteenth century, with the names of all the inmates, and a great deal else.[1] At this time Pentney seems to have been by far the most efficient and flourishing monastery in Norfolk. There were a Prior and seventeen Canons, everything was going on in a most satisfactory way, the buildings were in an admirable condition of repair, the school was regularly kept, and the services were all that they ought to be. I am sorry to say that at the Priory of Norwich, where there were forty-five monks, things were not as they should have been, but with that I have no present concern. Two more Episcopal Visitations have come to light since I was fortunate in discovering Bishop Goldwell's: both of them during the Episcopate of Bishop Nix, one conducted in 1514, the other six years after; in 1514 there were only ten brethren, besides the prior; in 1520 eleven. In 1514 the report, though contrasting very favourably with that which is made elsewhere, yet indicates that the old *prestige* had somewhat declined. The Prior confesses to having been careless in his accounts, and two of his Canons complain of his slackness in discipline and especially that they had had no schoolmaster for two years past. The abuses

[1] This visitation of the monasteries in the diocese, together with some others of a later date, I edited for the Camden Society in 1888.

appear to have been rectified, and at the next Visitation there are no complaints: all things are going well. But the monasteries were doomed, and all over England men seemed to have felt that they had done their work and were hardly wanted. Certainly the smaller houses had lost their hold upon the confidence of the people high and low. At last the suppression came—that act of tyranny and outrageous robbery about which one cannot speak without shame and horror and indignation that anything so abominable in the way in which it was carried out should have disgraced the annals of this country. Bear with me while I refresh your memories with a few dates and memoranda.

In October, 1535, Henry VIII. sent round his visitors to find out all the evil they could, and to invent all the abominations they could against the religious houses. To find out the evil would have taken a great deal of time and trouble, and might not have repaid the inquisitors after all; to invent enormities which would shock the susceptibilities of the most unclean and raise a cry among the mob was a very easy task, for men who were of unclean lives, of filthy imagination, and blasted character. The miscreants appealed to their imagination for their facts, and in three or four months pretended to be in a position to report veraciously upon the

condition of every monastery and upon the private life and habits of every monk or nun in England. In less than six months after the common informers had been sent out, the Act of Parliament was passed for giving all the smaller houses in the hands of the King—absolutely, mind, with no conditions.

The next step was to make a survey of the lands and property of the houses so condemned. As far as Norfolk was concerned that survey was intrusted to certain gentlemen of position and character, who were to draw up an elaborate report of all the Norfolk monasteries. That report has been printed in Mr. Rye's "Norfolk Antiquarian Miscellany," and is, I believe, the first of these documents which has ever passed through the press. The survey was conducted with great rapidity; the whole matter was carried through as much as possible by a *coup de main*. The Commissioners began their work on the 10th of July, 1536, and finished it about the 28th of August. The unhappy inmates of the monasteries, panic-stricken and distracted, had hardly two months to consider the ruin that was coming upon them before the thunderbolt fell. There is reason to believe that the dissolution of the houses followed *immediately* upon the drawing up of the survey, and that one morning there was a large establishment carried on pretty much in the way that it had gone

on for centuries, and employing a large number of people engaged in various forms of labour; and the next there was a mere empty range of buildings, stripped to the bare walls, the furniture removed, the cattle driven off, the servants dismissed with a month's wages, and only a single caretaker left behind, who was responsible for the custody of such trumpery utensils as had not yet been cleared off.

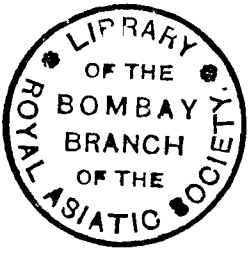
When the suppression came Robert Codde was Prior of Pentney. He was a man of some note, and was brother of Thomas Codde, who was Mayor of Norwich at the time of Kett's rebellion. He became Prior about 1520, and at that time held other preferment, insomuch that he was compelled to get a dispensation from the Pope (Clement VII.) for non-residence and plurality of benefices. It is evident that Pentney flourished under his rule.

When the *inquisitors* came they reported that there were a prior and twelve Canons in residence, and so high was the character they bore that even the filthy informers only ventured to invent lies against four of them. When the Commissioners appeared next year three of these twelve had either died or otherwise disappeared, and the report of them is that they were "priests of very honest name, and good religious persons, who do desire the King's Highness to continue and remain in

religion." The whole establishment comprehending the labourers on the land, the household servants, the poor men supported by the alms, and the boys at the priory school, of whom there were thirty, numbered eighty-three in all, exclusive, of course, of the prior and Canons themselves. On the 15th of February, 1537, the King's Commissioners came down to this house, passed through that gate that we have passed through to-day, and entered that great range of buildings of which hardly a trace remains. They sold every sheep and cow and horse; every bench and table; every bushel of corn; every stick of furniture; every surplice, cope, cloth, or curtain in the church: they turned every man and boy out of the place, giving them the most insignificant and contemptible dole, showed no mercy, locked the doors, and put in a caretaker. The Priory of Pentney was dissolved. The prior survived the spoliation some fifteen years, and became a somewhat prominent person in the diocese. He received a pension of £24 a year. Of the Canons I know nothing but their names.

The chief buyer at the sale of movables was the Earl of Rutland, and I daresay that at Belvoir Castle there are many records of this priory waiting for the time and the man to come together, when we shall be wiser than we are. We shall

then learn something of the building up of this remarkable monastery—something of those who were buried within its walls, something of the life that its inmates passed—something, but perhaps not much. Even a very little of such knowledge would be a gain—a gain upon the blank ignorance, the thick darkness under which we are lying now.



IV.

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF ENGLISH TOWNS.

I.

THE great Roman historian, Tacitus, writing about a hundred years after Christ, lays it down as a fact, which everybody knew at the time, that the German people to the north of the Rhine had not only no cities, but could not endure that one house should abut directly upon another, or that there should be raised among themselves streets of houses and buildings after the Roman fashion. Among them every man's house was surrounded by its own open space or court, and any association based upon such community of interest as the proximity of permanent domicile implies, was unknown.

Just a century and a half before Tacitus wrote

his Germania, Cæsar put together his notes of what he had learnt about our British forefathers. Let it be remembered that the inhabitants of Britain during the century before Christ were Celts, whose ancestors had developed a civilisation far in advance of that which the Germans had as yet arrived at, and had long ago emerged from the fierce and rugged barbarism which still prevailed among the nomads, huntsmen, and warriors, who clung to their wandering independence in the country between the Danube, the Vistula, and the Rhine. Nevertheless, Cæsar expressly tells us that even the Britons understood by a town (*oppidum*) only a fortified enclosure, in which the tribe, or sept, or clan, could find a refuge when war broke out in its borders, and from which they issued forth to pasture their herds or till the ground when the war was over (B. G., v. 21; *cf.* 1. 4). Happily the researches of the last thirty years have discovered and drawn attention to many remarkable confirmations of Cæsar's statement. More than one or two of these early British fortresses have been examined with their ramparts and ditches still easily traceable; which yet proved so little able to withstand the assault of the Roman invaders, that there, in their midst, to this very day the Roman Camp may be seen; while, a foot or two

below the surface, the bones and weapons and money and ornaments of the conquerors and the conquered lie side by side as they were left eighteen centuries ago. Vast as was the extent of these British enclosures, it admits of proof that they were not places of residence, but, as Cæsar describes them, were camps of refuge, the defences kept up in time of peace by the labour of a whole people, who as yet had little idea of associating themselves together for any other purpose than warfare, and had not risen to the conception of stable institutions and all that they imply. The most extensive of these ancient inclosures are to be found in Gloucestershire and Dorset. One of them, called Maiden Castle, may take rank among the most stupendous earth-works on the face of the globe.[1]

When the Roman Legions advanced in their irresistible progress from the Eastward and overran the South and West, they found it necessary in many instances to occupy the earlier British inclosures, but they seldom raised there any large camp of occupation. The Roman camps in Britain, of which so many traces remain, in which whole legions or large bodies of troops were quartered, which served as *dcpôts*, and became the places of

[1] See "Ancient Monuments of the Mississippi Valley," p. 11.

residences for the military governors of the surrounding district, were almost always planted on lower ground and by the side of a river. These tended to become places of resort for traders who settled outside the walls, and they were also the channels of communication between the conquerors and the subject people, who gradually acquiesced in the state of things which they found to be inevitable, and gradually gave up their roaming habits and learned to accommodate themselves to the ways of civilised life. Thus the Roman occupation wrought a marked change for the better.

The Britons became a peaceful and law-abiding people; the differences in race, which had tended to bring about disunion, ceased more and more to operate in the direction of disintegration. The *Castra stativa* developed into the *towns* of the Romano-British period—towns which, in many cases, having passed through some strange vicissitudes, having been laid waste, destroyed, left desolate, and again revived, exist at the present day on their old sites, though their constitution and their corporate life have undergone important modifications.

It has been said, and said truly, that "each of the leading cities and towns of England has some distinctive character of its own which parts it off from all others, and which may almost pass for

its definition." The English towns fall into groups or classes, excluding those which have grown up in quite modern times, and whose rapid progress and extension are due to the springing up of industries which the enterprise of the last century or two have developed. It may be accepted as a statement of the case not far from the truth if we say that in order of time the earliest and most important group of towns with which we are for the present concerned are those whose civic life can be traced to Roman times. Nevertheless, it would be an over-statement to assert that all these towns were strictly of Roman origin. Town life in Britain had apparently already begun before the Romans came. London was clearly a large and important city, with commerce and trade, in the century before Christ. Exeter, though a place of defence, a citadel for the gathering of the tribesmen on occasion, was something more. Even in those early days there probably were something like centres of trade in the Eastern Counties; for the coins of the Iceni in copper and gold testify to the existence of a state of civilisation in the first century of the Christian era (and even anterior to that period) in which the requirements of commerce had necessitated a currency. Colchester (*Camulodunum*) and Old Sarum, there is ground for sus-

pecting, were the centres of some ancient tribal worship; and during the century of peace which followed the repulse of Julius Cæsar, immigrants from the Continent had built towns at Bath and Ilchester, not to speak of those others which are said to have been founded among the Yorkshire Wolds. But all these early aggregates of population inhabiting permanent and contiguous dwellings, and associated for other objects than defensive warfare, became absorbed in the Roman Conquest, were remodelled as to their local governments, and were made to submit to such laws and ordinances as the conquerors chose to impose. They were all brought under one set of hard and fast rules, which were rigidly enforced by an external authority. They had no *liberties*, no individuality. The grandest ambition which any of these early towns could hope to attain was that its citizens might be admitted to be *citizens of Rome* by virtue of their being regarded as "colonies" of the conquering people. Such an honour was conferred upon the inhabitants of Cambridge, and Bath, and Gloucester, and some others of which a list might be formed.

The Roman occupation of Britain lasted for three centuries and a half. It began in A.D. 43; it came to an end in A.D. 410. Before the 4th century

had closed it had become evident that the government of the island did not pay its expenses; nay, that the retention of so distant a province, so far from being an advantage, was a source of weakness and a serious drain upon the resources of the Empire. During all those centuries the Britons had been kept down under the heel of an iron military despotism. Rome had indeed defended them from themselves, from each other, and from foreign enemies; but it had been at the expense of the people's manliness and self-reliance. Think what would happen to any people on earth, twenty successive generations of which had been sternly forbidden to bear arms in their own defence! Suddenly, as it appears, the huge army of Roman mercenaries was withdrawn, the towns and fortresses were left ungarrisoned, the legionaries, who had been the people's protectors so long, left the helpless nation to its fate, mocking them with the dreadful gift of a freedom which meant no more than the liberty of surrendering themselves to the domination of new masters.

From over the sea those new masters came—the hordes of Saxons and Angles, the fierce and pitiless warriors of that Germanic race whose contempt for the townsmen and the town life was almost as great now as Tacitus had described three hundred

years before. They poured in upon the doomed land as the Israelites did upon the cities of the Canaanites, as the Vandals did upon the cities of North Africa. Whenever they came they came as destroyers. The old towns were pillaged and left. These ferocious Teutonic barbarians, revelling in carnage, put the clock back in Britain. Yes; put it back four hundred years. They, too, threw up their great earth-works as defences to baffle the despairing efforts of a people emasculated by ages of submission, but they scorned to turn to account the mountain fortresses of the earlier Britons, or the more carefully constructed *castra* of the Romans. They brought with them new tactics and a new system of fortification, which was adapted to the more dispersed and straggling warfare to which they were accustomed; they scattered themselves in small and numerous bands over the island, and everywhere they gave the towns up to pillage, converting them into ruinous heaps, and leaving them for the wolves to dwell in.

So it went on for nearly two hundred years after the Romans left the wretched Britons to themselves. The old civilisation was almost blotted out, and the old religion with it—for there had been some form of Christianity prevalent under the Roman sway—and with this hideous obliteration the towns almost vanished.

Almost—not wholly—London continued to retain some remnants of its ancient civic life. Exeter never sank into nothingness. Chester, Lincoln, and some few others became from time to time rallying points for fugitives, and centres round which the unhappy people gathered, and where they made their desperate stand. But there were no longer to be found any centres of luxury and ease where the dwellers in the streets and the saunterers in the public square could enjoy security and amusement, sheltering themselves within the circuit of stone walls. The obliteration of the old civilisation which had grown up under Roman protection, and had been in great measure the result of Roman colonisation, was almost as complete as that which followed upon the occupation of Mexico by the Spaniards, almost as complete, as ruthless, and as savage; the difference between the effects that ensued lying in this: that the Spaniards brought with them their own culture and their own faith, such as they were, while the Germanic bands brought no culture, and in the room of the religion which had now become the established religion of the Roman world, they substituted a confused and confusing heathenism.

But as the conquerors went on in their career of carnage and destruction, driving the Britons

before them further and further westward, their very success in warfare, and the very completeness of the devastation that followed upon their march, necessitated the revival of that trade and commerce which they had extinguished. As the host of warriors increased in multitude and the wave of assault grew wider in its reach, the necessities of the commissariat and the demand, if only it were for weapons and implements, must have made itself felt. There was increasing need of craftsmen, and stores, and supplies, which the plundered towns and the slaughtered townsmen had furnished in abundance for a generation or two, but which at last fell short. As the mixed multitude of Germans and Angles and Jutes drew together, and slowly grew into the English people, the restless tribesmen and kindredmen found themselves compelled to become tillers of the soil. Peace inevitably aroused the social impulse, and a yearning for repose and union grew up among these fierce warriors, who had grown weary of war and battle without end. Before the 6th century was well closed some commerce had returned, and before the 7th century was half done the English conquerors had themselves been vanquished by the conquering cross.

1. New forces were at work, and they worked concurrently. As a people of kindred blood (for

all these separate bands that had come from different points on the Continent spoke the same tongue, and their several dialects differed but slightly), the tendency grew ever stronger to merge their family and tribal rivalries in a common unity and to submit themselves to the discipline of a government which, though it might be hateful to them in so far as it was centralised, yet had this in its favour, that it was in its essence representative and stable.

2. So, too, when these men found themselves stirred strangely by the preachers of the new Faith, and a new sense of fellowship sprung up among them—the outcome of agreement in the same religious beliefs, and hopes, and fears—the desire for union led them to join together in religious communities which in idea were societies for mutual defence against the powers of evil that were warring against the soul.

3. Lastly, the mere lust of gain, which their forefathers in the days gone by had hardly known, or had known only to regard as a petty vice to scorn, had already become a powerful incentive to concerted action among them, and they had got to see that the profits of commerce and trade would be best assured to them by co-operation; mutual support and mutual defence affording some guar-

antee for the safety of those ventures which, if they were made in isolation, would but tempt the spoilers.

On all sides the forces which tended to cohesion were at work. The several village communities, each with its local *customs* which served for laws, gradually drew together, and agreed to submit to the arbitrament of a larger assembly, where disputes might be settled without an appeal to brute force. So the *Hundred Court* originated in a coalition of Tun-moots associated as a court of appeal, where, if justice and right could not always be found, it was at any rate demanded and looked for. So, too, the early monastic establishments in these times were little more than associations for keeping alive the religious life at a higher level than could be reached by men and women whose devotion was not carried on in sympathy and neighbourhood. And so again the old family compacts for mutual defence and support in war developed into the gilds, or associations of craftsmen and traders, of which, though it would be too much to say that they were the origin of the new towns, yet they were the natural outcome of the changes that had passed over the people, now become familiarised with the new conditions of life which the growth of trade and commerce had introduced. Men became united by the bonds of some common interests, and were

kept together, not by the ties of blood alone, but by the constant pressure of common needs.

Thus it must be truer to say that the earlier *gilds*, such as we know them in the later centuries of the "Saxon" kingdoms, originated in the new towns rather than that the towns originated in the gilds, or truer still to say that the town and the gilds grew up together, inasmuch as neither could do without the other, while the social fabric was as yet unconsciously adapting itself to the requirements of the coming time.

As the monasteries increased in number and wealth, and their discipline improved—though before the Norman Conquest came that discipline was evidently laxity itself as compared with what it became afterwards—these religious establishments presented great attractions to those who had a taste for leisure or culture or art. Inside the sacred precincts dwelt a class whose resources were ample and their influence exercised in the direction of refinement and intellectual advance. The Conventuals were spenders of money and benefactors whom it was well to live near. Of course, it followed that outside the walls there gathered numbers who were attracted by the hopes of gain or any chance of lucrative employment. Hence the monastery became continually the nucleus of

a new town, which might, in some rare instances, have sprung up on the site of the old Roman city, but which, for the most part, grew into importance where there was little opportunity for trade. Thus the great Abbey of St. Albans was founded on the site of the Roman town of Verulam, and the monastic buildings were largely built with the Roman bricks of the ruined city; but the Abbey of St. Edmunds was far away from any Roman station, and the town that grew up outside the abbey walls was altogether a new town which owed its rise, and may be said to have depended for its existence during many generations, on the support and patronage which the great East Anglian monastery afforded it.

When the Danes came in upon the land during the 9th century, they came as plunderers and marauders in the first instance, but they came as something more. It was not long before they settled down as immigrants who meant to stay and make their *homes* in the lands they coveted. So far from being destroyers of towns, the Danes were almost as much traders as pirates, and they used the seaports as commercial centres, from which they developed their trade.[1] The Irish towns, Dublin,

[1] On the increase of trade and commerce under the Danes. See Mr. York Powell's review of Keary's "Catalogue of English Coins," *English Historical Review*, No. 17, p. 134.

Limerick, Waterford, and Cork, originated in Danish settlements, and whatever may be the history of the confederation of the "five boroughs" —Leicester, Lincoln, Derby, Nottingham, and Stamford—it is certain that for many years this association of towns—which even thus early might claim to be called civic communities—constituted for many years the strength of the Danish hold upon Mid-Britain; while, again, in the Eastern Counties they seem to have occupied the towns of Colchester, Bedford, Huntingdon, and Cambridge, as centres of government, where the tribute they levied on the surrounding districts was paid and perhaps treasured.

Hence it appears that the English towns which had originated in the desire for union and consolidation which came upon the Saxon invaders when their conquest was completed and peace settled upon the land, so far from being arrested in their growth by the coming of the Northmen, were rather stimulated to greater activity, and grew more rapidly to a consciousness of their own importance and a readiness to claim a certain measure of independence or privilege which should be substantial advantage to their inhabitants. And in tracing the development of English municipal life, the influence of the Danish occupation during the 9th and 10th

centuries must by no means be passed over as a factor which contributed not a little to that development.

Thus far we have seen that the English town was a thing of English growth—not an importation, on the one hand, as the Roman colony or municipium was an importation of a foreign institution into another land, nor, on the other hand, a survival of a state of things which was continued from age to age, as was the case with the towns of France, whose boast it is that they have kept up till the present day the traditions of civic life which they got from their Roman masters. Among us there was an age of obliteration before the time of reconstruction began, and when the new growth started into being, it was characterised by a vigorous spontaneity. The new towns were neither revivals nor reproductions of the old ones that had passed away.

II.

When we begin to look into the history of the English *towns*, we are very apt to be led astray by assuming that the more modern word *town* means the same, or pretty nearly the same thing as the more ancient name which historians now commonly

spell as *tun*. In the period preceding the Norman Conquest it may be accepted as a statement conveniently near the truth that England was divided into some thousands of geographical areas very unequal in extent, which were occupied by communities whose members were united together by very intimate relations, which were governed each by its own unwritten code of "customs," possessed a certain constitution, and were to a very great extent self-supporting. The boundaries within which these communities lived were jealously guarded from encroachment on the part of any neighbouring tillers of the soil, and in many cases were clearly marked by rude inclosures which served at once as boundaries and as defences against trespassers. The lands included within these limits were defined as the *tun*, and the community as an aggregate of people having a common interest in making the most of the land and in preserving its own unity and independence was called a *tunship*.

As long as the community contented itself with living on what its land could produce, and one generation only trod in the steps of the preceding one, there was no great difficulty in keeping up the *status quo ante*. The moment, however, that the produce of the land was in excess of the wants of the community and it became a question how to

dispose of the surplus commodities, that moment trade and commerce began, and with the beginning of commerce new complications were inevitable. The old "customs" and old methods for settling disputes were found to be unfitted for the new conditions that had arisen, and the machinery which sufficed for the regulation of the earlier *tunship* tended to break down. The more trade and commerce increased in any wide area, the more necessary it became that the contiguous tunships should come to some agreement whereby a Court of Appeal might be provided; and thus it would happen that a number of *tunships* would generally form themselves into a union which should in many important matters supersede the union of the smaller *tunships*. This union was a union for mutual self-defence, for co-operation, and for affording some assurance of justice and right in questions between man and man, such as had never emerged in the narrower life of the earlier *tunship*. This is what is meant when it is said that "London was only a bundle of communities, townships, parishes, and lordships, of which each had its own constitution."

What was true of London was true also of other *towns*. It was especially observable at Lincoln, and perhaps as true of each of the Five Boroughs of the Midland, which, moreover, appear in the early days

to have been united in a league or *hansa*, possibly an anticipation of the great league of the Baltic cities—and possibly, too, it may have suggested that other powerful league of the Cinque Ports on the south-eastern coast of England—Hastings, Sandwich, Dover, Romney, and Hythe.

It must be borne in mind that when the Norman Conquest took place, and during the century that followed, there was strictly no such judicial machinery as we now understand when we talk of the "law courts" and the "law." When the *towns* grew into important communities and aimed at "freedom," the liberty that they strove for was first an immunity from appearing before the Court of Appeal, where the king's officer presided and levied his fees; and, secondly, an immunity from personal taxation exacted by the officers of the Royal Exchequer. To get rid of these burdens they asked for the privilege of choosing their own portreve who should preside in the town court and set them free from the necessity of appearing at the Court of the *Hundred;* and they asked, too, for the liberty of taxing themselves and compounding for the capricious and arbitrary exactions of the officers of the Exchequer by the payment of a lump sum or annual rent to the King—such annual rent being called the *Firma Burgi.*

When a *town* had obtained for itself these liberties or privileges it had passed out of the larger class of merely agricultural communities or *tunships*, and it had passed into the smaller but higher class of trading communities. It became a chartered town —that is, it had obtained from the sovereign freedom from the exactions of the sheriff, to try its own prisoners, to settle its own trade disputes, and to raise such taxes as it needed for its own wants, much in the same way as borough rates are levied now. But the town was not free from contributing its share to the *national* taxation. The charter was purchased for gold from the king, or from the great lords who held the several boroughs under the king. In the latter case the charter held good, because the rights of the lord extended over the hundred in which the town happened to lie, and it excluded also the interference of the sheriff or other similar intrusion of the king's officer.

But there were other towns that grew up rather as aggregates of traders which had not yet acquired any other cohesion than as organised communities, and these towns were the mere *market towns* which still exist up and down England in large numbers.

It is difficult for us to realise the fact that there was a time, and a long time too, in England, when a man could not buy and sell where and when and

with whom he pleased. Yet it is certain that within the limits of the ancient *tunships* exclusive dealing was the rule, and trade with the outside world was regarded with suspicion, the trader being supposed to be seeking to enrich himself by parting with that in which the community had some interest. Hence, when the instincts of trade had proved too strong for the jealous restrictions which the petty tunships were inclined to put upon it, and it became apparent that people who wanted certain commodities *would* buy and sell them however much you might try to prevent them, the next step was to legalise trade in a given area, and to provide that it should be carried on under some sort of police supervision and control. People were not to be allowed to sell when and where they liked; they were only allowed to buy and sell at certain centres and at certain specified intervals of time. The inhabitants of this or that conveniently situated locality were allowed to hold a *market* once a week, or it might be oftener; bargains were to be carried on in public; rents were to be paid for stallage; dues were to be levied upon sales. The village grew into a town, and the townsmen prospered. But such towns need not necessarily pass out of the rank of market towns, and in point of fact very few of them did. Thus, of the hundred and twenty towns to which King John

granted market rights during the seventeen years of his reign (A.D. 1199–1216), scarcely more than half a dozen ever rose to the rank of chartered boroughs, and some are now obscure villages where even the weekly market has dwindled to nothing.

If, however, the town which may have begun to be a centre of trade outgrew that condition of affairs for which the mere right of holding a weekly market sufficed—that is, if the petty dealings which were confined to a limited area developed into the larger transactions of a widening commerce—then the town sooner or later won its charter, paying for it the purchase money in the first instance, as has been said, and obtaining for itself some form of self-government; it became a chartered town. But the charters granted by successive kings were by no means identical in form. The privileges purchased and bestowed varied very greatly from time to time.

To begin with, the *buyers* of the charter in one place might be the few or the many, and they who had advanced money for the acquisition of certain privileges or advantages were not likely to allow others to share in the boon obtained without securing to themselves something like a higher status in the newly-recognised town. There were some of these dwellers in the towns who were *free* by birth—there were some who were not, just as in America a

generation back there were masters and slaves. In America the broad distinction between the two classes was sharply marked by difference of colour. In early England there was indeed the same difference between Jew and Gentile which was easily discernible by the eye, but between the *politically free* and bond there was no such physical mark of distinction. The Jews, who were to be found in considerable numbers in some of the English towns, were never *freemen* of the boroughs; they lived apart in a quarter of their own, called the *Jewry;* they were there on sufferance. There were, however, others, Christian and English born, who, because they were "bondmen by blood," could not be admitted as burgesses of the borough till they had somehow worked out their freedom. It was the interest of the old burgesses to assert themselves as against the new men and to keep in their own hands the good things, whatever they were, which their charter secured to them. It looks as if they who were the children of bondsmen in one generation had some difficulty in obtaining for themselves recognition as freemen in the next. It seems, too, that in many cases the only means whereby they could secure such recognition was to get themselves first admitted as members of the *gilds*, of which we have heard before.

The increase in the number of these gilds was looked upon with some suspicion and dislike by the powers that be. They threatened to become dangerous associations whose interests were antagonistic to the interests of the king and his officers in one direction, and a check upon encroachment on the part of the richer burgesses on the other. As early as 1180 Henry II. forbade the formation of new gilds without royal license; and as many as eighteen *adulterine* gilds were fined during this reign on the ground, presumably, that such unions aimed in one way or another at interfering with the king's prerogative in the several towns in which they had been organised. For, in theory, the burgesses of a chartered town were the resident householders who paid *scot* and bore lot, which, being translated into modern language, meant those who paid *rates* and were liable to be elected to serve certain offices in the town, which were more or less burdensome.

In the first instance only the burgesses had the liberty to buy and sell within the limits of the borough. But as the trade of any town increased, it would happen that the burgesses would perforce extend their operations with outsiders whose capital was embarked in the trade, and who might or might not be residents. Thereupon it would become necessary to provide security for such outsider that

his share of profits should be assured to him. Neither he nor his agent or factor could become a burgess without some difficulty; but if an association were formed among the *merchants* which afforded a certain guarantee to all its members that the interests of each and all would be protected, a merchant or his agent, though a non-resident or an alien, might still safely embark in the trade of the town, even though he were no burgess—that is, he might be elected a member of the *Merchant Gild* and enjoy all the advantages which he cared to enjoy though never a burgess. The same might happen in the case of the gilds of craftsmen. These craftsmen gilds were intended to keep up a monopoly of the manufacture of certain articles. The Saddlers, the Girdlers, the Glovers, and fifty other "city companies" or gilds, still exist in the city of London, and are the survivals of the old state of affairs when it was practically impossible for such an *Establishment* as we are now all familiar with to sell a waistband, a pair of gloves, a glass bottle and a horse collar at the same counter. If you wanted any one of these articles you had to buy it of the maker, nor indeed could you always buy it safely of him unless he were a brother of the *gild* associated for the protection of the interests of the craftsmen who kept the manufacture of such articles in their own hands.

Here again it is obvious that occasions would arise when the makers of this or that article would find it prudent to admit sometimes an intelligent capitalist into the brotherhood, and sometimes a pushing inventor, who, though a non-resident in the borough, might be willing enough to employ the craftsmen if they would manufacture some improved article to his order; and as in the former case, so in this, such employer of labour might be admitted to the gild, though he were no burgess of the borough. Gradually the power and influence of the gilds in the boroughs would become more and more potent, and the tendency would increase for all members of the gilds to be accounted, and to become also burgesses, and for every burgess on the other hand to be enrolled as a brother of some one of the gilds.

The next stage in the development of the boroughs was reached when the richer and more energetic of the burgesses had acquired so dominant an influence that they began to get the government of the boroughs into their hands, and when an oligarchy which appropriated to itself a name that anciently had a very different meaning, under the designation of a "common council," arrogated to itself the right to initiate any measures which were carried out, and assumed to itself also the exclusive right of admitting new burgesses. When this stage was

reached the next object of the boroughs was to obtain a new charter of *Incorporation*, whereby the status of the oligarchy was recognised, and its functions and supremacy were legally established. These charters of incorporation appear to have begun to be granted in the reign of Henry VI., though it is very doubtful whether the assertion so often made can be substantiated, that the first incorporation of a municipal body was granted to Kingston-upon-Hull in the year 1439. The incorporation of boroughs continued steadily after this, and the effect of such incorporation, as has been stated, was to throw all administrative power in the boroughs more and more into the hands of a few, while the great body of the inhabitants had less and less voice, and only a small privileged class were permitted to give their votes even for the very men who were elected to be the representatives of the borough in Parliament.

A single instance will suffice by way of illustration. In the year 1585 the little town of Helston, in Cornwall, obtained one of these charters of incorporation. By virtue of this charter the mayor and *commonalty*, with the four aldermen of the borough, were allowed from time to time to admit any "honest" inhabitants to be freemen of the borough, and the new corporation, which had the power of adding to itself new members or refraining from

doing so according to its pleasure, was privileged to send two burgesses to represent the borough in the House of Commons. In the year 1774, less than two centuries after the granting of the charter, there was a parliamentary election at Helston. It then appeared that, in consequence of the obstinate refusal of the oligarchy to admit any of the inhabitants to the freedom of the borough, the corporation had dwindled down to six, and these *six* men actually elected two members to the House of Commons; and in those critical years in the world's history which followed 1774, those two members took their seats and recorded their votes on those momentous questions with which everybody is, or ought to be, abundantly familiar.

From what has been said it will have been made clear that during the four centuries after the Norman Conquest the growth of the English towns did not mean so much their growth in wealth or prosperity, but meant very much more their growth in a certain sort of political power. They did not grow as much as we should have expected in size or population; for in these respects the towns increased so slowly, so imperceptibly, as almost to perplex the student of history by their apparent stagnation. The chartered boroughs grew in the sense that there were more of them—they grew in numbers; that was almost

inevitable, for each town as it won its charter pursued a policy of the most jealous protection of its supposed interests and privileges. Exclusion of any foreigners was the one object which the burgesses kept before their minds. If the trade of a town increased beyond the powers of the townsmen to deal with it, they never thought of extending the limits of the borough and *including* within the new limits an increased population which would bring wealth to the original community. So far from this, they fiercely *excluded* all aliens, and aimed much more at keeping their towns to themselves and monopolising their privileges, than at throwing open their gates and widening their operations. Hence it was inevitable that the surplus trade was forced to find a new home for itself, and one market town after another obtained its charter of incorporation only to find itself sooner or later pursuing the same blind and selfish policy—only to find that it too, in its turn, had outgrown its power of dealing with its increasing commerce or manufacture.

The towns *multiplied*, they did not grow to greatness. When the Flemings, whom the detestable persecution of the Spaniards in the 16th century forced to take refuge in the eastern counties of England, were graciously permitted to settle in Norwich in 1568, the city was swarming with

beggars, and scores of houses were in ruins, for the trade of the town had been of late seriously declining. Nevertheless the Norwich citizens were immensely indignant that the foreigners should be allowed to settle among them, and revenged themselves upon the new-comers by making their lot as hard as they could. It was the way everywhere. Thus it came to pass that even so late as the 17th century, when the Pilgrim Fathers made their grand start to find better homes in the new world, there was not a town in England, except London, that could boast of thirty thousand inhabitants, and not five towns that could boast of ten thousand. Yet the towns were strong in their numbers and the comparative wealth of their inhabitants. The sympathies and instincts of the townsmen were indeed in favour of a certain sort of progress; in favour, too, of a certain limited freedom of opinion, and opposed to the domination and intolerance of the Church on the one hand, or the tyranny of the courtiers and nobles on the other.

When the great upheaval came in religious matters which we call the Reformation, the townsmen almost everywhere were strong and bigoted Protestants. When the other upheaval came which we call the Great Rebellion, they were, as a rule, bitter Roundheads. And when the time came for that remodelling of our constitutional machinery which we are wont to

associate with the Reform Bill of 1832, again the townsmen were for progress, and that not only in the great aggregates of population which had no representative in the legislation and no political status (because they had no charters and no corporate existence), but even in the smaller and insignificant boroughs; for there too the inhabitants had their grievances, and the oligarchs had not gained the love or confidence of their fellow townsmen.

Before this crisis arrived, however, there *were* towns that were springing up, there were towns that had sprung up, which had indeed grown in wealth and influence and prosperity—towns which seemed doubtless to the ancient boroughs to be huge and monstrous exaggerations of the reasonable proportions which a self-respecting corporate borough or chartered town ought to content itself with maintaining.

Of these later towns—whose origin it is not difficult to trace—whose enormously rapid increase in population is to be accounted for without any necessity for much historical or antiquarian research—towns which owe their greatness to their geographical position or of favourable circumstances, which may be said to have given them birth—of these it is not within my province to speak, and I leave them to those who are inquirers into fields of Political and Physical Geography, or the History of Commerce and Economics.

V.

THE LAND AND ITS OWNERS IN PAST TIMES.

[Ad Populum.]

In November, 1889, I undertook to deliver a lecture in the theatre of the Midland and Birmingham Institute on "The Land and its Owners in Past Times." It would have been ridiculous to read an academic treatise on such a subject to an audience of fifteen hundred people, at any rate upon a week-day, and accordingly I took my chance and trusted to find in the inspiriting presence of such an assembly the words that might fairly express my meaning. Practised orators acquire the accomplishment of saying in an hour what they wish to say on any theme they set themselves to discourse upon; but for myself I have never acquired this knack or art, and when I had exhausted my time, I brought my oration to a close with the conviction that I had bungled sadly.

Since then a brisk correspondence has been going on in the newspapers about the very subject which I was venturous enough to deal with, and it has been represented to me that there are some—perhaps not a few—who would be glad of such a popular view of the subject under discussion as I endeavoured to lay before my Birmingham audience.

It might or might not be easier to deal with a question of this kind by attempting a scholastic and severe handling of the whole matter; but, other considerations apart, my experience has taught me that the generality of fairly educated people learn most from those who assume that their readers or hearers know least.

A specialist is not always the best instructor even on his own subject; he is apt to forget that he was himself at one time a beginner, and apt to take it for granted that everybody knows this or that. In the following pages I assume no special knowledge on the part of whosoever may attend to me. Here are some facts that everybody does *not* know, which everybody would be the better for knowing, which some will be glad to know, and which some who pose as teachers of new things do not seem to know, and yet ought to know better than any one else. As to the discussion that has been going on between the giants who soar into the higher regions of specula-

tion, and do battle for and against such academic subtleties as rough-and-ready politicians cannot away with, that is no concern of mine. When a man presumes to address the many rather than the few, he must avoid transcendentalism if he expects to be listened to. It is dangerous swimming in a fathomless ocean when the monsters of the deep are showing themselves on the surface.

Let my readers, then, imagine themselves in the great Hall of the Midland Institute on any evening they please. To them enters the popular lecturer, who may be supposed to speak as follows :—

As I stand upon this platform my feet are planted upon the carpet which is spread upon the boards; these rest upon joists and beams; they upon something else; but at the foundation of all, at the bottom of all, there remains the *land* on which the whole building reposes.

I presume I may take the liberty of asking to whom does this land belong? And I am not likely to be wrong in assuming that the carpet and the furniture and the building and the land all belong to one and the same owner or owners—to wit, the Society or Corporation of the Midland and Birmingham Institute. So far so good.

But there are two more questions which I must

take leave to ask before I can get on, and they are (1) How did the Society become possessed of the land? and (2) What was the nature of the possession acquired?

I. The first question is soon answered, and yet the answer is not without its suggestiveness. The land, I suppose, was bought by the Society from some previous owner. That means that the land is now a saleable commodity—and a commodity sometimes owned by a single person, sometimes by a society or a corporation; that is, sometimes held in severalty and sometimes in common. We may go on to add that the land may be cut up into very minute portions and sold by the yard, or it may be sold, as you may express it, by wholesale; and when sold the enjoyment of this commodity or the use of it may belong to a single landlord or to a community of owners.

And yet it is a fact, which is a great deal more certain than many so-called facts can be said to be, that there was a time, not so very long ago, when the land of this country was not to be bought or sold for money as it is now, and when it was not divisible at a man's pleasure, *i.e.*, in no sense to be *sold retail*.

II. But what is the nature of the possession acquired by the present owners of this piece of land? If I take my handkerchief out of my pocket I show

you something which certainly belongs to me; I bought it and paid for it. If I please I may—*as I can*—toss it into the fire and reduce it to ashes in a few moments; in fact, destroy it, practically get rid of it, annihilate it. So with the gold chain at my buttonhole; I might, if I could, serve it in the same way, but practically I *cannot* utterly destroy it, for gold is a very indestructible substance, and though I may hammer it into gold-leaf or beat it into dust, the gold practically remains unchanged, only the form of the gold alters. But with regard to the land I neither may nor can destroy it, nor can I deal with it as if it were a private chattel. I *cannot* destroy it; I *may* not quite serve it as if it were wholly and exclusively mine.

This, however, is but the beginning of our difficulties. Observe, I can measure and weigh this rag of linen or this golden chain; it is so wide, so long, so thick, it weighs so much. But can I get the dimensions of this land as easily? Can I get them at all? We say that a man buys so many acres or so many square yards of land. That is the length and the breadth of it. How about the depth of it? May I, if I choose and if I can, may I build an Eiffel Tower upon it, say 2,000 feet high this time, and this time not of iron but of brick or stone? Clearly not! Because if I did so I should inevitably

interfere with my neighbours' rights of enjoyment of *their* land. I may not shut out the light of heaven from them nor interfere with their claim to the free current of the air that is our life; for my neighbours who own their land claim all that is *above* it as far as the stars in an infinite column upwards; and for a like reason I may not go digging away to the centre of the world so as to prejudice their rights *below* the surface—for when we say we own this or that patch of land, we mean that our ownership reaches to the zenith above and down to the centre below.

And yet so inextricably are our rights entangled that we are all more or less limited in our ownership; and with the land which belongs to him no man can say in all strictness that he can deal as if it were absolutely and personally his own. So that the old distinction between real property and personal property is based upon fact and truth. For what men make, what they produce by personal toil or skill, that is personal property, *i.e.*, it owes its very existence to human effort and human intelligence. But what, according to the old cosmogonies, man did not make, but which, rather, man was *made* of—the good old mother earth—that is *not* personal, but antecedent to human personality; for man could not exist without the land, though the land could do very well without man.

So far, you observe, we have got to this: that when we talk of being owners of a certain tract of land, we mean that we are owners of a certain superficial area with appurtenances thereto belonging, such appurtenances extending to the heavens above and to the depths below, but that our title to those appurtenances is limited. There is a point at which we are sure to be stopped if we so invade the column of air above us that other owners of land are wronged by our vaulting ambition; and there is another point at which we shall be sure to be stopped if, by dipping down to the depths below us, we injure the subterranean appurtenances of our neighbours on this side or on that.

But this is not all. You say that the land on which this building stands belongs to this Society or Corporation. Suppose that one fine morning one of those horrible men of science, who are never tired of discovering something, were to announce that under this floor at a certain depth there ran a seam of the richest coal, which if it were worked for a year or two would produce untold wealth, and suffice to build a dozen such halls as this, and still leave a vast surplus to pay off all your debts and relieve you of all fear of paying rates for another century at least. I presume the temptation would be irresistible to let this Hall take its chance. You would

have a shaft sunk in a few weeks or months, and down you would go burrowing into the bowels of the earth in search of the hidden treasure. That is to say, you would do this *if you might*. You will do this if you *may*. But may you? "This land belongs to the Corporation," say you; "therefore yes!" But we have seen that for all your claim of right you may *not* go as high as the Tower of Babel if you are mad enough to conceive the whim of climbing up to the moon. Your neighbours will cry out—"The winds of heaven and the moving air are not yours to obstruct and play your tricks with; the blessed sunlight is not yours that you may leave us in darkness and rob us of our ancient lights. The upward appurtenances of your plot of land are common property. If you stretch your rights too far, they cease to be your rights and become our wrongs."

That is intelligible enough as far as your *upward* appurtenances are concerned. But when we come to claim, what I venture to call, our *downward* appurtenances, these things are not so simple and plain. We have assumed that this Society bought this land. Who did they buy it of? When did they buy it? Under what conditions? With what reservations?

Leaving other questions on one side, let me ask, Did the former possessor of this landed estate—in

selling this portion of his property—did he reserve the mineral rights? If he did, then all the coal of Newcastle may be packed close and deep under this floor, and yet the Corporation of Birmingham may not touch it. It belongs to some previous owner of the land, and a lordly treasure-house it may be; but it is all his, it is not yours, however much you might like to have it. I said "some previous owner." And here comes in another of those anomalies which make every step in the study of this subject bristle with difficulties. For if it were only coal that was to be found, the coal would belong to the first owner of the soil who reserved the mineral rights, and he might be a man who purchased the landed estate one day and sold it the next. But if it should turn out that this Hall were built upon a gold mine, the gold would belong to the crown.

Do you see what we have come to? This parcel of land on which we are at this moment standing seems to belong to no *one* person or corporation absolutely. No one owns it to such an extent as to be able to deal with it as if it were a personal chattel. The owner is stopped if he goes too high, and he is stopped if he goes too low. In other words, we may say that this land is after all *held in joint proprietorship*. The neighbours have rights in it; the overlord who reserved his minerals has

rights in it; the crown has a claim upon it, if there are precious metals below the surface; and it may be, for all I know, that there are other persons who, so to speak, may claim to have a finger in the pie, and who, in a sense which I will not at this point stop to explain, may have something to say in the way of claiming a proprietary interest in it. And yet I can hardly be wrong in assuming that this Hall is built upon freehold land, as it is called, and that the fee, as it is called, belongs to this Society.

I shall have to get away from Birmingham soon, but I cannot quite leave it yet, for it is necessary that I should carry you back to a time eight hundred years ago. It is just about eight hundred years ago since a survey was made of Birmingham and its neighbourhood, among other places, and the record of this survey still exists, and may be read by any one who has learnt the trick of deciphering it. The record does not tell us *very* much, not, of course, as much as we should like to know, but it does tell us something. We find that at Birmingham about the year 1089 there was a certain William, son of Ansculf, who owned a landed estate at Birmingham. He had, I suppose, inherited it from his father; for Ansculf himself had been a great man in his day, and had done good service in the wars. He seems to have been a considerable personage, whose an-

cestors had lived in a great castle at a place called Pinkeny or Pinchingi, near Amiens ; and when William the Conqueror was gathering his host about him to win the crown of England, and with it the land of England, Ansculf, seeing that William was the right man to follow and serve, threw in his lot with the great leader, and brought his retainers along with him ; and I suppose he had his share in the fighting, and he got his share of the spoil. Then he died, not, however, until he had been very well paid for his services. His son William followed in his father's steps, and when the Warwickshire folk set themselves against the Conqueror, and gave him some little trouble, the son of Ansculf, I take it, stood by his leader ; and then, I think, he too got his reward. But there was an Englishman named Ulwin, who was a small gentleman in his way, living at this time in Warwickshire, who it appears was not gifted with foresight and worldly wisdom—he was of the school of Mrs. Partington, and apt to entertain conscientious objections to the Atlantic Ocean—and when the great tide of conquest moved his way, he set himself to stem it. Ulwin had what we now call *an estate* of no great importance *at Birmingham*, with a house upon it, such as it was. He had half a dozen or so of people, who were more or less dependent upon him, living on the estate,

and a wood, or patch of forest, part and parcel of the said estate, or let us call it his *lordship*. William the Conqueror made short work of the wretched Warwickshire folk who stood in his way; he found out who they were, what their names were, what their lands were, and all about them that he cared to know, and he put his hand upon that land and all that appertained to it, and making very little difficulty about the transfer, he gave it piecemeal to his supporters, the men who had stood by him in the struggle. "Who is this Ulwin?" quoth the Conqueror. "An insolent little upstart rebel, it seems, giving himself airs by reason of his trumpery lordship and his half a dozen ragamuffin tenants, and his few dirty acres, and his woods where the swine munch the mast. Such a man is to be cleared out of the way. As for his land, be it enacted that from henceforth his land, or his lordship if he likes, is no longer the possession of this Ulwin, but that it belongs to the son of Ansculf and his seed for ever!" Thereupon the son of Ansculf became Lord Birmingham. In a sense it belonged to him. In what sense it did so we shall see by and by.

But you will say, "Surely, this was a very high-handed proceeding. The king *could* not do this, he had no *right* to take away the poor man's land and give it away in this outrageous fashion!"

Observe how here we find ourselves slipping into another question—a question of abstract right. With that question let me say at once that I have no concern whatever at this moment. If you object that the king *could* not do as he did, I can only point to the stubborn fact that he *did* it. If you insist further that he had no right—no *moral right*—to do it, I have only to say that you are at perfect liberty to think as you please upon that question, and that I rejoice with all my heart that you, at any rate, are not disposed to confound might with right; but, for myself, I am not lecturing on ethics, or discoursing upon the eternal obligations of the Ten Commandments. This only I know, that when that poor little gentleman, Mr. Ulwin, was dispossessed of his own, and his lordship was handed over to the son of Ansculf, people had a much weaker faith in abstract right than they have now, and a very much stronger belief in the rights which conquest conferred upon the conqueror; and when a doughty king like the great William won a territory by his strong arm and irresistible power, and none were able to stand before him and say him nay, then this conqueror had no manner of hesitation in taking what he thought fit to claim, and giving it to whom he would. Yes! even the land.

But the son of Ansculf was a very big man, and this

Birmingham estate was certainly not the place he would have chosen to live in. Why didn't he sell it and get rid of it? Sell it! Well, I will not go the length of saying that eight hundred years ago land was not a marketable commodity, because that would convey a wrong impression; but this I will say, that it would no more have entered into the head of the son of Ansculf in the year 1090 to hand over his little Birmingham estate to Tom, Dick, or Harry for money down, than it would have occurred to him to sell his backbone for a bank post-bill. "Well! But who did he leave all his land to?" Do you mean by will? If you do, again you are going astray, for the answer to this question brings us face to face with another fact which will, I am sure, be a surprise to many of you.

In those days in England men could not make a will and leave their land to whom they please.

If the son of Ansculf had died without heirs, his land would have gone back to the king who gave it. As it was, he had an only daughter, and all his estates went to her. But in those days buying and selling of land was a thing almost unknown, and leaving a landed estate by will was not known at all. And there was good reason for this; for by the conquest of England, or consequent upon it, eight hundred years ago, the king became the supreme landlord;

all the land of the nation, the old folkland, became his ; and all private land was held of him mediately or immediately. When, therefore, we hear of a gold-mine under this Hall being the property of the crown, we come upon a survival of the old theory—the land may belong to you or to me in a certain sense, but there are limits even now to our ownership. There are some things in the land which do not belong to us, some things which we may not claim as our own, even though they be found on our land. We may not dig up the gold that lies buried under our kitchens!

I said just now that after the Conquest the king became the supreme landlord, and that all the land in England was held mediately or immediately of him. Well, that is true and it is not true. It *is* true if we mean that the *bestowal* of all the land and all its appurtenances belonged to the king. It is *not* true if we mean that in every case the king could bestow it upon any one he pleased. For ages anterior to the Conquest there had been a portion of the land of this country which had been reserved for the maintenance of a certain class in the nation, and in addition to this reserve of land there had been, speaking within limits, a reserve of a share of the appurtenances of all the other land under cultivation. The reserve lands were known as church

lands, and the reserved appurtenances were known as tithes. When the Conqueror took to himself the right of dealing with the land as a whole, he acknowledged that in the bestowal of the church land and in the bestowal of the tithe even his power was limited. The church lands and the tithe, he acknowledged, could only be bestowed upon a tenant for life who was a clergyman, or upon a religious corporation, which was treated as if it were in some way or other exercising the functions which the clergy could discharge.

There is an entry in the great Survey of Hants which gives us a good illustration of what I mean. The commissioners are giving the king information concerning a place which they call Stanham, and this is what they say :—

"Richer the clergyman holds the Church of this Manor, and with it two other churches near Henton, which belongs to the Mother Church ; and close to this church there lies a Hide of land (about 120 acres) [also held by Richer], and in addition he owns all the tithes of this township—*even the tithes of the King's land.* He *did* hold this of the Bishop, he *does* hold it now of the King."

That is to say, that this reverend gentleman—Richer by name—had been presented to this living of his in the first instance by the Bishop as *patron of*

the living. Then came the Conquest; and the Conqueror, using his high-handed proceeding, took to himself *not* absolute possession of the land reserved—still less did he call back the appurtenance called the tithe, even though it was levied upon his own royal domain—but he took to himself the right of saying to whom the life-interest of such land and appurtenances should be granted in the case of an avoidance. And yet he tacitly acquiesced in his power of disposing of the benefice being a limited power. He could only confer the life-interest upon a clergyman. The enjoyment of such land and tithe was limited, inasmuch as the estate formed a part of the reserve of church lands.

Now you may perhaps have observed that so far I have not gone behind the date of the Conquest by the great William. I have taken this as my *terminus a quo* for many reasons, but chiefly for this most important reason—that no man holds land in this country upon a title anterior to the Conquest. The settlement of the land by William the Conqueror may be said to be practically the beginning of things; and if we go behind that we are plunged at once into the region of cloudland, of hypothesis and theory: we leave the sure standing-ground of facts.

But having in a manner carried you *back* to this point—the point beyond which we will not travel in

our tracing the origin of things which concern the history of the property in land in England—let us see what we find. It is this, that eight hundred years ago we have all the land in England claimed as his own by the sovereign, and acknowledged to be his by the whole body of the landowners. Yes; the whole body of the landowners—indeed, we may say the whole nation—submitted to hold all their land of the king: all the land was, as it were, forfeited to him. Some of it—indeed, a great deal of it—he gave back to the landlords who had previously owned it; but these consented to hold their lands as *tenants* of the great Conqueror. Some of it was handed over to his brethren in arms—they too being his tenants. Some of it was reserved for the maintenance of a privileged class (the clergy), to whom it was given for their several lives, and at their death it reverted to the king in some cases, to the landlords (who were the tenants of the king) in other cases; but this land could only be held for life by clergymen. Thus, then, all the land—speaking within certain limits—was held subject to the condition of performing certain services. In the case of the laity, the service was in the main the service of helping the king in war; in the case of the clergy, it was the service of keeping up the worship of God and performing the offices of religion.

And because this reserve of land and appurten-

ances had been submitted to for many centuries, and had been acquiesced in by successive generations—the non-clerical owners of the land having no thought of revolting against the old *status quo ante*—the Conqueror in this instance made no change; and thus the settlement of the land question by William may be said to have been arrived at on the theory that the real supreme landlord of all the land in the country was the king, who at his pleasure made grants of certain lordships or fiefs or manors to whom he would—these grantees becoming tenants of the king, such tenants having the right to make what they could of their lands on condition, first, that they acknowledged his sovereignty by rendering him certain tributes or "rents" for which they were liable, *or*, secondly, on condition that, being clergymen, they performed certain functions which only the clergy were qualified to discharge, and whereby the whole nation was assumed to receive a real benefit.

I have not yet done with the son of Ansculf. That vigorous and insatiable young gentleman was not going to be put off with such a poor reward as the lordship of Birmingham—a squalid little desolate hamlet with half a dozen huts, where the population huddled as best they could, and a score or two of lean hogs picked up a very precarious livelihood in the woods. There was a very much more consider-

able lordship hard by, which would bring him in a far larger revenue. In the survey this lordship is called Eston. *Now* it is called Aston, and is a suburb of Birmingham, and, I believe, contains more than 150,000 inhabitants; but in eight hundred years the look of some places changes a great deal, and so it has been with Aston, otherwise Eston.

This Eston lordship had formerly been one of the possessions of Edwin, Earl of the Mercians. It comprehended a large tract of arable land on which some forty families were settled, who, among them, kept eighteen or twenty ploughs going. There was a parson to look after them, and presumably a church for him to officiate in. There was a mill for grinding the corn—a sure source of income to the lord. There were some miles of forest, and there was a certain portion of the estate which the lord had kept in his own hands, and which is technically known as land *in demesne*, with, presumably, a house upon it called the "capital mansion." For some reason or other, this demesne land seems to have run out of cultivation, for at the time of the survey there was not a plough to be found upon it, though in better days it had taken six ploughs to keep it under tillage. Now it unluckily happens that when the men who drew up the survey of Warwickshire sent in their returns, they contented themselves with giving a

much briefer and less minute account of the several lordships than the surveyors of Norfolk and Suffolk had felt themselves bound to forward to head-quarters. The consequence is that we are compelled to fill in the void places by the help of conjecture and analogy; but we have certain data to go upon, and we are in a position roughly to form a probable estimate of what the Eston lordship was like. At a guess I should say that the whole lordship extended over at least 5,000 acres. I suspect the manor-house had been burnt down, and the whole place pillaged during the late rebellion. As to the 1,000 acres of arable land, it was cultivated as *open fields*. There were pretty sure to be some common pasture lands on which the cattle might be turned when the corn was growing. Also, over and above the woodland or forest, there was pretty sure to be another breadth of mere waste land, scrub or heath not worth the tillage—such land as in Norfolk was called *bruary*, where nothing but briars and thorns would grow. So that we have here what I must venture to call five different kinds of land, and why I call them so will appear in the sequel: (1) The demesne land or home farm of the lord; (2) the open fields cultivated by the tenants of the manor for their own profit, but yielding an annual rent to the lord; (3) the common pasture; (4) the forest or woodland, and (5) the

waste or bruary, which supplied a certain amount of fuel in the shape of turf, bracken, and brushwood for all the tenants, and cover for rabbits and other game.

It must be understood that this area bestowed upon the son of Ansculf was not a mere aggregate of estates each held in severalty, but was *one* and indivisible. When the Conqueror took upon himself to confiscate all the land of the country, that land was divided into a large number of small territories, each of which may be described as a miniature kingdom, with something like a constitution of its own. It will suffice to call these petty kingdoms *manors*, for that is the name which they were generally known by, and I call them petty 'kingdoms' because in those days people could only conceive of government as exercised by a chieftain or king or 'lord,' even though this chieftain or lord might be very far from being an absolute sovereign, and though the governed class had rights which acted as powerful checks upon the dominating influence of the chief ruler. Thus in the case of this manor or lordship of Eston the demesne lands with the capital mansion upon it represented the *residency* of the lord with its *home farm*, and it was the only portion of the estate that was surrounded by a fence or inclosure. Whatever hedges or palings were to be found elsewhere within the limits of the manor

they existed on sufferance or had been put up by license of the lord. If any one had dared to put up a fence without consent of the lord and without consent of the other tenants of the manor, it would have been pulled down very speedily and with very little ceremony, for the tenants too had a voice in the matter, and they too had an interest in resisting anything in the shape of invasion of their rights. And, as I have said, all had rights, and those rights were reciprocal; for as the owner of the demesne lands was the lord of the manor, so every cultivator of the soil within the limits of that manor was, in theory, the lord's man.

But when we come to speak of the open fields of the manor we come upon a condition of affairs which it is sometimes difficult for people in our time to understand. The open fields constituted a certain area of arable land within the manor which was cultivated by a body of tenants who held their several allotments by a very peculiar tenure. To begin with, these allotments or strips were scattered about in the most unmethodical way possible. It really looks as if the Conqueror when he gave away lordships to his supporters and, as we are told, took care to let none of his great lords have more than two or three such lordships contiguous—it looks, I say, as if he had taken a hint from the wonderfully

minute subdivision of lands in the manors themselves, and, seeing how such subdivision must tend to prevent the tenants of the manor from ever becoming individually formidable to the lord, bethought him that it would be wisdom to adopt in his kingdom the same policy which answered so well in the manor, the policy of *Divide et impera*. Be that however as it may, it is certain that the open fields of the manor were cut up into a very large number of strips or patches, which were held by the tenants of the manor under a very peculiar tenure. The tenants had the right of dealing with their lands as if they were their own for a portion of the year only; but if they did not clear off their crops by a certain day, the lord in some cases, the whole body of tenants in others, might turn their sheep or cattle into the common fields and devour whatever was left of the tenant's harvest.

On the other hand, these tenants to all intents and purposes possessed such rights over their several strips of arable land, and in many cases over enclosed meadows, and gardens and houses too, that they could not be dispossessed of their holdings at the will of the lord. They were tenants indeed, but they were tenants with a very real and definite *tenant right*.

But rights imply duties. What were the duties of these tenants? Well, one of the most important

of those duties was the duty of paying something in the shape of rent to the lord. In those days money was scarce—very scarce—therefore the dues rendered to the lord in exchange for the use of the lord's land were paid to a great extent in what I may as well call *kind*. The money rent was for the most part a small fraction of the payment exacted, but the other rent was at times extremely onerous.

Thus I could give you chapter and verse for one case, which is no better and no worse than hundreds of others that might easily be adduced, where one John, a tenant of the manor of Banham, in Norfolk, held twenty-five acres of the lord. For this he paid 9d. a year in money rent, but this was the least of his burdens. He had to do six days' ploughing and nine days' reaping in harvest-time for the lord. He had to do two days' work at haymaking-time, and half a day's work at carrying the lord's hay. He had to do four days' carting and nine days' of job-work in the lord's demesne whensoever it suited the lord to set him on, and he had every year to bring to the lord's house two hens at Christmas, twenty eggs at Easter, and four quarters of oats on St. Andrew's Day, *i.e.*, the 30th of November. If you add up all these dues—to say nothing of a great deal else that I must not dwell on—you will find that the dues paid by the tenants in those early times were by no means

light or inconsiderable. Nay, in many instances it is almost inexplicable how they were paid at all; the burdens in many instances which have come under my notice must have been almost crushing. And yet it must be remembered that there were certain alleviations of these burdens. In the first place the tenants had fixity of tenure of their land. It may be said pretty safely that in those days there was hardly anything in the shape of land laws, and the whole complex machinery of leases for a term of years was hardly known. Instead of any statute law, every manor was governed in the main by certain customs which had been handed down by tradition, and these customs it was the interest of every member of the community to keep inviolate. If any dispute arose it was settled, not by an appeal to any outside tribunal, but by bringing the cause before an assembly of the tenants—the *homagers* as they were called of the manor—and though at these assemblies or courts of the manor the lord or his steward presided, he was by no means supreme, indeed cases arose at times when the lord of the manor was actually censured for infringing upon the rights of the homage. Then, too, every tenant of the manor had rights over the waste, over any common pasture that there might be, and over the woodland in the manor.

There is a very widespread delusion among the majority of people to the effect that where a common pasture existed within the limits of an ancient manor, any one who liked, and who was an *inhabitant* of the manor, might turn out upon the common as many sheep and heads of cattle as he liked—a drove of camels or a herd of ponies. So far from that being the case, it may be said that there was no right which the tenants of a manor were more jealous of than the rights of common pasture. Not only could no one but a tenant of the manor turn even a donkey or a goose upon the common, but it was a matter of strict ordinance how many cows or sheep might be allowed to come from each holding. So, too, it was with regard to the waste or bruary. Then, too, there were very valuable rights which the tenants enjoyed, I mean the right of cutting turf for fuel, and of gathering bracken for kindling or thatching; but no one man or any dozen of men could be allowed so to use his rights as to deprive other men of theirs, and the rights of turbary were jealously watched by every member of the community, each having an interest in guarding all from the usurpation of any one. Lastly, in the case of the forest or woodland, the timber growing there belonged to the lord; but the tenants had in many cases the right of lopping and topping certain trees, and in my part of the world

you may see many an old oak tree that must be at least as old as the Conquest, and which for ages was subject to this treatment, the tenant never daring to cut the tree down, and the lord not caring to do so, but resigning it to the bills and hooks of the tenants of the manor, who hacked off the young branches when they came in handy for fuel or other purposes, and doing this in despite of the lord or by his connivance. Besides this right of lopping and topping, and certain other rights over the underwood and the fallen branches, there was a very valuable right of *pannage* in the woods, *i.e.*, the right of turning their cattle or swine into the woods to feed upon the mast or the acorns, or to browse upon the herbage; but all these rights were strictly limited. They were limited in time, for they began on one day and they ended on another day year by year, and they were limited in space, for the area over which they extended was, as I have said, clearly and sharply defined.

Such was the manor of Eston, which became the possession of William, son of Anscult, eight centuries ago. Such was his manor or lordship, or as we should call it now his *landed estate*, which, if he rose from the dead now to take a look at, he would assuredly not recognise as even remotely resembling what he once called his own. But having got this

lordship, with a great many others besides, what was he to do with it? He could not *live* there, for, as we have seen, the manor-house was probably a blackened ruin. He could not sell it. Could he give it away? No, he could not even do that. For you must understand that when the Conqueror bestowed a tract of land upon a new lord, he did not only give the land to the lord, but he did more—he gave the lord to the land. The lord was answerable to the king for the land, and for the men who lived upon the land, and lived by the land. If he could make anything out of his lordship so much the better for him; but, whether or no, he was answerable for the land and its cultivators in more ways than one, and occasions might easily arise when the grant of this or that manor (if it stood alone) might prove to be the gift of a very horrible white elephant to the grantee. What, then, was the son of Ansculf to do with his manor of Eston? There were two courses open to him: he might keep it in his own hands and manage it by a bailiff, or he might *let it out* to somebody else—by giving that somebody else a *perpetual lease* of the manor—receiving money down or an equivalent for the grant of this lease and receiving a peppercorn rent, as we term it, in acknowledgment of his overlordship. And he might further reserve to himself this or that privilege or contingent advan-

tage which his whim or his foresight might suggest as desirable to retain.

The son of Ansculf did *not* keep the manor in his own hands. He made it over to an Englishman to make what he could of it, and that Englishman's name was Godmund, whose descendants, for anything I know to the contrary, may be landowners in Aston or Birmingham to this very day. So Godmund forthwith became the lord of the manor, and "stood in the shoes" of the son of Ansculf, as we phrase it, though he was not the owner of the estate nor *directly* even a tenant of the king: he became what was technically known as a *mesne tenant.* When the king demanded his due on account of this manor of Eston he came upon the son of Ansculf for it, and left the son of Ansculf to settle with the mesne tenant as best he could. And when the son of Ansculf demanded his due of Godmund, Godmund had to settle for his own liabilities to the tenant-in-chief, and it must be admitted that as time went on Godmund and his successors contrived to shift such liabilities as they could upon their *sub-tenants,* that is the homagers or smaller landholders of the manor.

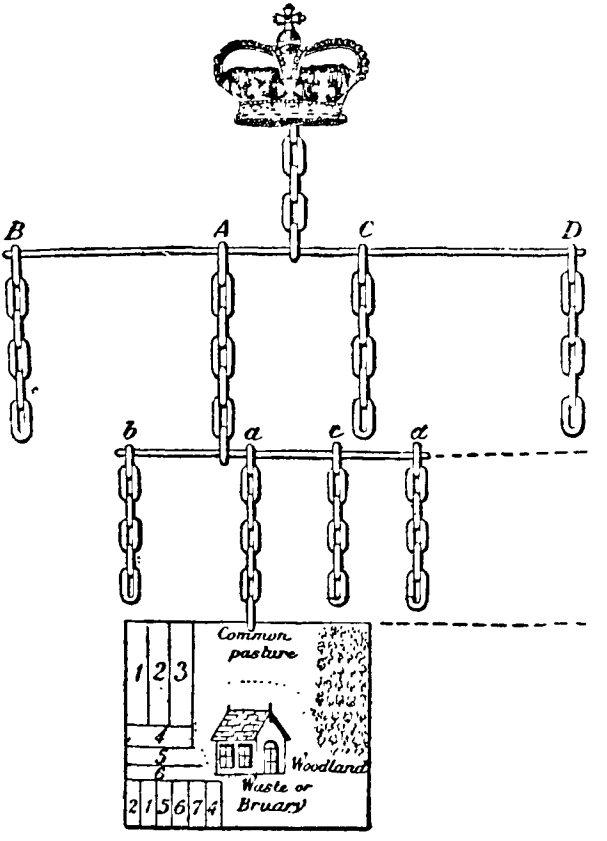
Thus, then, as regards this manor—and the same is true *mutatis mutandis* of all the land in England—the truth seems to be that it was a tract of land which had, and yet it had not, *got away from the*

original grantor—to wit, the sovereign. The king could not keep all the land in his own hands and farm it by an army of bailiffs. Landowners in ancient and modern times who have tried that experiment have discovered that there is only one class in the community that finds *that* a profitable speculation, and that is the class of which one representative has become immeasurably notorious, inasmuch as he will be known to all time as the unjust steward. So the king let out his land to certain tenants-in-chief, whom we will call A, B, C, D.

But the tenants-in-chief were in the same position as the king; they too had more land than they could manage profitably, and they too had not unlimited confidence in the steward or bailiff class. So they did as the king did; they too sublet their manors to the mesne tenants, whom we will call a, b, c, d. These mesne tenants thus became the real lords of the manors, but between them and the land there were the sub-tenants, who were the tillers of the soil, holding their land of a, b, or c, subject to certain rents, services, or burdens, but possessed of tenant right of which they could not be deprived. We will call them 1, 2, or 3. They were virtually part owners of the soil.

The accompanying apology for a diagram will,

perhaps, make the state of the case clear at a glance:—



Very noticeable is this point in William the Conqueror's settlement of the land question, that it

made no provision for any *sub-division* of the land. The Conqueror dealt with the land by wholesale, and it is hardly too much to say that, according to his settlement, selling land by retail was impossible. The manor was the unit. The manor with its group of sub-tenants constituted a *hive*, with its drones and its workers and its *queen-bee*. The tenants belong to the land as much as and more than the land belonged to them. No one of them could alienate his land or any portion of it at his pleasure; he might cultivate it or he might run away and leave it; but if he wanted to hand it over to any one else it was at the lord's option to say him Yes! or No!

But what happened if 1, or 2, or 3, or any other of the tenants of the manor, simply died and left no heirs—as they did die by the thousand in that dreadful year 1349? Then the land which had been held by these tenants came back to the lord of the manor —*escheated* to him as it was called. He got the land, but he was the poorer by the loss of the rents and services. He might, again, take the land into his own hands and farm it, but he could not absorb it into the demesne lands, for to do that would have been stoutly resisted by the tenants, for very good reasons which I will not stop to particularise; and inasmuch as the land of the tenants was, as we have seen, "scattered all over the place," to retain it

would have been madness. Therefore it was almost inevitable that the lord should let it out again, sometimes on the same terms as before, sometimes upon better terms. But as often as the lord saw that here a strip or there a strip lay conveniently near his demesne, or his woods, or his pastures, we may be pretty sure that such strips of land would be little by little tacked on to the lord's private property, and though this would not be done on a large scale, or by a *coup de main*, the process of annexation would be always going on; for the lord was, of course, a much bigger man than any of his tenants, and the tendency was always for him to become richer and more powerful, and for the sub-tenants to become weaker and poorer.

That is to say, on the land, as everywhere else, the tendency was and always will be for the big man to gobble up the small man—the weakest must go to the wall—and though you may set yourselves as much as you please against this tendency, you will never be able to resist this great law of the universe. Bring any molecule you please within the orbit of a body of greater volume and density, and the attraction of the greater will infallibly tend to absorb the less into its mass. From the point of view which a small man is apt to take of things in general, I confess I am sometimes tempted to rebel against this

kind of thing. I do not like the thought of being gobbled up by some great one, but I have arrived at the melancholy conviction that I cannot help it; and, moreover, I do not see how I could alter it for the better. The logic of words is often only a matter of contending fallacies, the logic of facts is irresistible. And so it could not be otherwise than that A, B, and C should tend to dominate more and more over 1, 2, and 3; for the sons of the soil—the tillers of the soil—had very little to fall back upon when things went wrong with them. Some went away to the wars; some went to seek their fortunes as pedlars or artisans; some took to crime and vice; some laid down and died, no one knew how, or when, or why; and some were hanged, and then again their land did *not* escheat to the king, but came back into the hands of the lord of the manor. The one class would be steadily, however slowly, going up, the other class would be going down.

But would not the same law hold good of the *tenants-in-chief* relatively to the mesne tenants or lords of the manors? No, not to anything like the same extent as in the former case. To begin with, the number of the mesne tenants was not a hundredth part of the number of the sub-tenants or peasant class. The lord of the manor was incomparably better clad and housed and "nourished"

than his tenants; he might grow fat while they starved; famine and nakedness were not in his line; they were often enough very near to *them;* disease stalked among them with a ghastly familiarity, and death came knocking at *their* doors, sometimes rather as friend than foe. For one lord of the manor who died without heirs up and down the length and breadth of England there would be a thousand of the sub-tenants who dropped out and none regarded. But if an a or b or c *did* die leaving no heirs to succeed to his lordship, what happened? Exactly what happened in the case of the death of 1, 2, or 3. The *whole estate* went back in its entirety to A, B, or C, the whole manor and all the tenants upon it, the whole *hive* and all the bees in it. That is to say, a, or b, or c, as the case might be, cease to exist, and the manor became linked to A, or B, or C without any intermediary, the rents or services remained absolutely as they were before, and so did the rights of the tenants, they stood exactly as they had stood, and things returned to the same condition that they were in before there were any mesne tenants, as the middlemen between A, B, and C and 1, 2, and 3.

This, then, is briefly a statement of the case with regard to the tenure of land in England as it was settled 800 years ago. Of course great changes

have come about in the lapse of centuries, but, as is usual with us in England, these changes have operated very gradually, and rarely have they been made with violence. Nay, so unwilling are we to break with the past and to tear up the old foundations, that the settlement made by the Conqueror, after all the great and many salutary changes that have come about, survives actually to our own time. Yes, the crown is still the one supreme landlord from whom all the rest in theory hold their lands. Still the land of the man who dies intestate and without heirs escheats to the lord of the manor, unless that land has been enfranchised, or to the sovereign if it no longer is part and parcel of a manor. Still the heirs of the mesne tenants or of the tenants-in-chief exact their mineral rights. Still the crown claims its royalty on gold or *flotsam* and *jetsam* on the shore. Even heriots are not quite things of the past, still less are those fines for entrance upon land held by copy of court roll. These things are survivals, but very real and active survivals; they are reminders that "though much is taken, much remains" of what we are too apt to think has utterly passed away—reminders which come to many men as ghosts to trouble joy. Meanwhile nothing is more certain than that the ownership of the land is incomparably more free and un-

shackled than it was. You may alienate your land to whom you please. You may bequeath it by will according to your whim and caprice. You may buy it by the acre or the square foot. You may sell it wholesale or retail, and even for exportation, if you could only manage to take it away. It might almost be thought that now there was no difference between "personalty" and "realty" except that the land is indestructible. All this change in the character of the ownership of the land of this country, in the power of dealing with it and the rights which assure its possession, cannot be regarded in any other light than as the result of progress and development in a condition of affairs which in the nature of things could not but change. The old order *must* change.

But if we come to trace the direction of that change we shall see that, whereas the proprietary rights of the landowner were originally limited and barred by very stringent checks, so that he was never allowed to deceive himself into the belief that his land was absolutely his own, to deal with as a chattel in the production of which he might have had a hand—now, on the contrary, we find men surprised and angry when they are told that even now they may not quite call the land their own. That is to say, proprietary rights in the land have been steadily growing in favour of the landowners for 800

years, and, in the opinion of some thinkers, they are not unlikely to continue to grow in the same direction.

On the other hand, there are economists of the root-and-branch order—economists who are in far too great a hurry to set things right to have any time to study history, which is always a long and laborious process, abhorrent to men who belong to the slapdash classes—and these tell us that we have gone on a great deal too fast in the wrong direction, and that the time is coming when we shall have to *nationalise the land.* For myself political theorising is not in my line, and Utopian dreams have no charm for my mind. But what seems to me plain enough as I look facts in the face, and what may not unlikely have dawned upon others who have followed me in the foregoing retrospect, is this: that the land of this country *is*—yes, it *is* nationalised—and that the basis of the settlement by the Conqueror eight centuries ago was actually this that some are advocating so loudly without knowing what they mean—to wit, the nationalisation of the land. In an age when men hardly could conceive of a nation except as represented in the person of the sovereign, all the functions of government seemed to them to be centred in him, and all national life and greatness seemed to depend upon him. If the land was indeed to be regarded as the

land of the nation, then in whom could that land be vested except in the nation's representative? The sovereign must needs become the supreme landlord. As long as, and in proportion as, that sovereign was an irresponsible ruler, and practically absolute, as long as his personal will dominated irresistibly over the nation that he ruled, again and again did he deal arbitrarily, tyrannically, despotically, and outrageously with the land of persons or corporations. I need only refer you to such a stupendous act of pillage as the plunder of the lands of the religious houses, or the innumerable examples of confiscation of the landed property of high and low.

When, on the other hand, as has happened at least once in our history, the sovereign has not only been reduced to a cipher, but the nation has determined to do without him, then similar acts of confiscation and resumption of land by the supreme landlord have been carried out; the nation in this case taking just as little heed to consult the sovereign as in the former case the sovereign took to consult the nation.

When, as in our own times, absolutism had become as much a thing of the past as chain-armour, and the nation had learnt steadily to work out its purposes and to carry out its resolves in, and with, and by the dignified and intelligent co-operation of

the sovereign—the sovereign who had given up all dreams of playing the autocrat, and gloried rather in being the constitutional head of a great people—then if it has seemed good to the nation to assert its claim to be considered still the supreme landlord, there has been no timidity or hesitation in putting forward that claim, and no tyrannical and cruel disregard of national obligations expressed or implied in ancient covenants. But where it was abundantly plain that it was for the interest of the many to sacrifice the proprietary rights of the few, the nation, the sovereign of course concurring, has over and over again taken possession of large tracts of land which the private owners were not allowed to withhold, and dealing immeasurably more justly, immeasurably more generously than king or commonwealth had done in former times, the nation has respected the vested rights of the personal proprietors by awarding reasonable compensation for the enforced determination of a long-standing contract. This has been going on among us during every session of Parliament for generations, and this will continue to go on to the end. After all, it seems that the instincts of a great nation are wiser than the dreams of philosophers, and working politicians are more to be trusted than mere thinkers when great problems have not only to be thought out, but to be worked out in the national life.

VI.

L'ANCIENNE NOBLESSE.

[A Lecture.]

I HAVE undertaken to offer for your acceptance this evening certain facts or suggestions, which appear to myself not wholly without their significance, regarding a class which it is believed are rapidly disappearing from the face of the earth—or at least from that portion of the earth's superficies which is comprised within the islands of Great Britain and Ireland. That class is generally known as the class of country gentlemen. It is said that in the Great Republic of the West there is room for everything except the cultured man of leisure, living upon his broad acres in a big house, and shooting partridges and hunting foxes over his wide domain. It is said that there were once magnificent representatives of this class

even in America; but they were the product of the sublime institution of slavery, and with the abolition of that primeval condition of society the American country gentleman passed away for ever. So, it is said, must all country gentlemen pass away; they belong to the palæozoic strata which underlie the surface of the social fabric as we know it—that crust of extinct races and nationalities, with all their myriad creeds, and laws, and grotesque observances, and fantastic codes of ethics; that crust of the social fabric which, like the others, has had its stupendous upheavals, bringing the wildest political theories to the top and making them dominant over enormous areas of human activity through long ages, and which has its corresponding subsidals, swallowing up and overwhelming beliefs and convictions which were full of hope and promise, and leaving only here and there a tiny fossil, which, if it had a voice, would have a strange story to tell.

Well, well! It may be so! The country gentleman is, we are told, a survival of the palæozoic ages. But it is worth our while, before he quite goes from us, to see the kind of monster he was at his best—to examine this curious specimen of the *genus homo* as he has appeared in some stages of his development. Granted that he is an anachronism, the very oddity

of the creature tempts us to study him briefly as he was, and as he is, before he quite vanishes from the scene.

How far can we get back? For anything I know to the contrary, there may be in the records of Egypt many evidences of prosperous gentlemen who were thriving landlords 5,000 years ago. Unfortunately, I know nothing of Egyptology, not even at second hand. But there is an extraordinary wealth of documents which throw a marvellously clear light upon the daily life and habits of some great nations who bore sway in Mesopotamia in times only a few centuries later than the days when the earlier Egyptian dynasties succeeded one another on the Nile.

From these documents, it becomes abundantly clear that twenty or twenty-five centuries before the Christian era there were hosts of country gentlemen, the exact counterparts of our modern squires, who were holding large estates and living as great landlords, and exercising immense influence over wide areas, sometimes for good, sometimes for evil, precisely as their successors have been doing everywhere again and again.

About 2,000 years ago, one of these gentlemen, bearing the name of Utuki Senui, underlies the serious suspicion of having been quite a *land-grabber.*

He seems to have been troubled by finding that a neighbour of his, named Utuki Idiuna, had some land which lay most inconveniently between two estates of his own. There were ten inclosures of arable land, apparently two meadows, and, as it seems, two plantations of date palms. Nothing would content the poor gentleman but he must buy his neighbour out, and buy him out he did accordingly—say a century or so before Abraham.

But what sort of a man was he? Can we form a guess? Yes, and very much more than a guess. This Chaldean gentleman was a highly educated person; he had to learn at least one dead language, which had ceased to be spoken perhaps a thousand years before he was born. He had to get up his lessons with grammar and dictionary, as school-boys do now when they learn to read Homer; and some of his school-books are to be seen to-day in the British Museum by any one who likes to look at them. He had public libraries to consult in all the principal cities, and he frequently sent those libraries presentation copies of books which were wanted. He could, if he liked, take a stroll in the botanical gardens, which were founded by a sovereign in the old days, or study astronomy at the public observatories, then much more common than now. He seems to have been fond of literature, very fond of art, and the

science of his day was not to be so entirely despised. If he bought land, he sometimes mortgaged it too; and he went to law, as we do now, about the veriest trifles, when he lost his temper or believed himself wronged. But, above all, he was extravagantly fond of hunting, and he kept his horses and hounds, and he preserved game with a tenacity of purpose quite admirable to notice. To be sure, there were some big beasts that only the king might hunt, precisely as at the present day the King of Italy keeps to himself the privilege of slaying the *bouquetin*. And, as time went by, the Chaldean or Assyrian country gentleman stocked his preserves so full, and guarded them so jealously, that the creatures he hunted grew disgracefully tame, and the beaters had to make them get up to be speared by whipping the covers with big whips to rouse the poor things into a trot.

If you want to know more about the country gentleman, say 4,000 years ago, in that wonderful land between the Tigris and the Euphrates you have only to spend a week or so among the Assyrian antiquities assembled at Bloomsbury with the very valuable guide-books in your hands, and you will soon know more than I can tell you.

Now it is no part of my plan to review the whole course of ancient and modern history, or to show how things went on from century to century in the

great plains of Mesopotamia; but this is certain, that when, in the year 401 B.C. (a good deal more than a millennium after the days of Utuki Senni, the gentleman who bought the estate that lay in the middle of his own, another country gentleman, whose name was Xenophon—this time not an Asiatic, but an Athenian citizen—found himself in command of the 10,000 Greeks who were making their way home from Cunaxa on the Euphrates after the death of Cyrus.

Xenophon has left us a minute and most interesting journal of his march to the Mediterranean; and among other things that he notices are the frequent *parks* of the country gentry which he came upon all along the line of his march. Sometimes they were mere pleasure parks surrounding the great houses of the nobility, sometimes they were forests well stocked with deer and other game. They were the survivals of the old times when lions and panthers had been slaughtered in the great *battues* sculptured on the ancient Assyrian monuments, and when the "early" inhabitants of the land had something to fear in their conflicts with the now almost extinct *carnivora*. But *there* were the parks, and *there* were the country gentlemen, addicted to the old sports, with their mansions, their retinue, and their state. The land had grown incomparably poorer, the commerce and

the trade had dwindled, the population had decreased to a mere shadow of what it had been in the time of Tiglath Pileser and the other great rulers of the Assyrian empire; but the irrepressible country gentleman was still to the fore. As long as anything went on, he went on—this persistent, leisurely, cultivated, dominating, and strangely successful landlord. Men might come, and men might go, but he went on for ever. . . .

I have said that Xenophon was himself a country gentleman. There never was a more perfect representative of his class. In all ages and countries the country gentleman has been found taking his part actively, intelligently, bravely, successfully, in the armies of his country, wherever that country might be. And, as we have seen, Xenophon was a most able and gallant soldier. If it had not been for him, those 10,000 Greeks would have been made mincemeat of by those treacherous scoundrels the Persians. Read the "Anabasis" of Xenophon, and you will find all about it. Read about it in the Greek if you can, and you will be a better and a wiser man for your pains. Read it in a translation if you cannot, and you will regret that your education was so neglected by yourself or your seniors that the grace and beauty of the original is blurred and obscured for you.

But there are some other works of Xenophon

which have come down to us which show us the man, not as a soldier, but as a real, healthy, jovial country gentleman of the real old school—always robust and vigorous, almost restlessly active; a man of a hundred accomplishments; a man of books as a reader and an author, with one of the clearest, simplest, and most lucid styles that ever cultured writer attained to; a student of philosophy, history, and of politics, and one of the earliest and most suggestive pioneers in the science of economics; taking his recreation in a manly, almost boisterous way, as a genial and indefatigable sportsman. He has left us actually a regular treatise upon hunting, has given us some excellent hints and directions for the training and breeding of horses and dogs. He was a model farmer on a large scale. When they banished him for his devoted friendship to Socrates, he went away and settled at Scillus, near Olympia; bought an estate there, and lived there for some twenty years with his wife and children, with his books and his hounds and his horses; and when at last the Eleans drove him from there, he went and took a town-house at Corinth, and there he died.

But don't suppose that there were only a few such country gentlemen as he in Attica or Sparta in his days. When Xenophon was a boy, the great drama of Aristophanes, *The Clouds*, was acted in the theatre

at Athens, and I dare say Xenophon went to see it. Now the whole plot of that most famous and unique masterpiece of Greek literature turns upon the marriage of a worthy middle-aged old squire of the gentry class, who had got into the hands of a matchmaker and been induced to marry a fine lady of the aristocracy, of the noble family of Megacles. He had the land and the money: she had the high birth —the old story. The fruit of the union was a boy, whom his mother spoilt. He took to the turf, kept horses, laid the odds, was a regular plunger, and got deeply into debt with the money-lenders, who again, after the old fashion, came upon his father, Strepsiades.

The play opens with old Strepsiades tossing sleepless upon his bed, thinking of the usurers and the bills that are falling due; while his son—call him *Philip*, that will do—is dreaming of his horses, sometimes snoring, sometimes talking in his sleep about the races that were on. Let me read you a few lines of the old play. Thus speaks old father Strepsiades—

"O dear! O Lord!
O Lord! O Zeus! These nights how long they are!
And here's this hopeful son of mine wrapped up
Snoring and sweating under five thick blankets.
Come! I'll wrap up and snore in opposition!
Pheu—Hum! Baugh! Whee-ee—
Ah! I *can't* sleep a wink; devoured and bitten

All through this son of mine. *He* curls his hair,
And sports his thoroughbreds, and drives his tandem ;
Even in dreams he rides : while I—I'm ruined,
Now that the paying time has come ! . . .

* * * * *

Flunkey ! My ledger ! Let me reckon up
Who are my creditors and what I owe them.
Come, let me see ! Here's fifty pounds to Pasias.
Why fifty pounds to Pasias ? What are *they* for ?
Oh ! for that chestnut cob from Corinth. Well, what next ?
A curricle and wheels, twelve pounds—Amynias. . . .
And so, and so, and so on !—My poor lad ! . . .
For ever cursed be that old matchmaker
Who stirred me up to marry your poor mother.
Mine in the country was the happiest life—
A plain man, blunt, no courtier, independent,
Full of my sheep and beehives, and my vineyards,
And then I married—blunderer that I was—
A fine town lady—the Hon. Miss Megacles—
A regular proud, airified coquette.
This wife I married ; and we came together.
And when at last to me and my good woman
This hopeful son was born—our son and heir—
The boy she took and used to spoil him, saying,
'Some day you'll drive in purple in the Row !
'Like Megacles your uncle.' Whilst I said,
'Some day, my lad, you'll drive our goats about
'Just like your worthy father did before you !'
Little he heeded *my* advice. But soon
A *galloping* consumption came upon him !—
Consumption comes apace upon *my* fortunes.
My son's part is the *galloping*."

*

Before we pass on from old Strepsiades the country gentleman, with his rugged virtues and his

hard measure, I beg you to note that in this case, some 400 years B.C., we find that the young rake, who lives among jockies and blacklegs, does little bills and plays the prodigal, frequents the cockpit and is a mere trifler and a *masher*—he is *no* country gentleman at all, but a mere dissolute young townsman; and that all his follies and vices are of the streets and squares. If he goes to the bad it is because he has ceased to be the country gentleman, counting that life too *slow*. It is his worthy father who is the representative of the squire of modern times—a thrifty, upright and downright conscientious man, with a great deal of solid self-respect; and if he ends by losing his head at last, it was chiefly because he learnt that that young scamp of a son of his had no heart to lose.

Let us move on. We will travel westward again; and onward a couple of centuries or so, and transport ourselves to Italy in the days of the Punic Wars. Then we can hardly help making the acquaintance of a real old country gentleman of the real old stiff and stubborn Tory school—Cato the Censor. He came of a good old Italian stock of landed gentry who had clung to their broad acres near Tusculum, and had never cared two straws for titles and honours. There was a strong Conservative reaction going on in Italy amongst the young

men. Cato hid himself away on his Sabine property —farmed it, improved it, ruled his dependents with horsewhip in hand, and stung them with the stings of that rod of rods for a fool's back—a biting tongue, that spared neither man nor maid, old women nor children. A sort of Lord Grimthorpe, who loved to lay the lash on. He too got a commission in the army, and proved himself a gallant and able soldier. When a lull came in the war, he went back to his Sabine estate, dressed like a farmer, ate hunks of bread and cheese with his tenants; came down like a sledge-hammer upon any luckless steward who was twopence wrong in his weekly bills; told his neighbours they were fools and old fossils; served on the bench as a county magistrate, and appears to have been a most influential Chairman of Quarter Sessions.

He had a neighbour down there; one Flaccus—a Nobleman he, while Cato was a Commoner. Flaccus was one of the leaders of the Tory party. It was the Young Italy party of the day. They wanted to put the clock back, or if not that, yet they wanted to put the regulator hard at *slow!* Flaccus said to Cato, "Young man, you're exactly the sort of colleague we want. Join us!" Cato all this while was very much more than a mere agriculturist; he was that and almost everything else besides. He

was an omnivorous reader. He trudged about the clods in the daytime in his heavy boots; sometimes put his hand to the plough; looked after the cattle and the pigs; at night-time he went to his library and buried himself in his books.

"The dolts know nothing about high farming!" he said to himself; "I'll teach them!" So he wrote his famous treatise on the tillage of the soil and rural life in general. It has come down to us, and may be bought for a song.

"Aye! and they know less about gardening! Look at the wretched state of their flower-beds and parterres!" quoth he. So he wrote another book about gardening and floriculture. Mind! I say *floriculture*, not only advice to the growers of carrots and cabbages!

When he grew old he wrote a sort of anticipation of Lord Chesterfield's Letters to his son, in which he warned him against physicians. They were a very poor lot in his opinion. Let a wise man keep out of their way; avoid pills, and live on salads and poultry; sirloins and haunches of beef or mutton were to be avoided—they were only fit for kings or other such anomalous persons. "*Kings*," he said, "were naturally carnivorous persons." Even hares were not always wholesome; they made people have bad dreams!

With his fiery eyes and his unkempt red hair, a frame of iron and of gigantic strength, a loud harsh voice and never at a loss for the most forcible words, he became a power at Rome, and was raised to the peerage as a matter of course. Every now and then he went back into the country, thrashed his slaves unmercifully, frightened his household till they were half-dead with terror at the sight of him; went on pouring out volume after volume; was a most learned antiquary amongst other things, and gave himself in his later years to Greek literature, which he pursued with immense enthusiasm. The old heathen grew disgracefully rich at last. He had a remarkable faculty for stock-jobbing; speculated largely in building companies, water companies, and land; and, sad to tell, he even became a great money-lender. *Farming!* Alas! alas! alas! Farming, he said, didn't pay.

See how History repeats itself for ever. The Serpent of Time is always swallowing his own tail!

Turn over the page again, say three hundred years later or so. Things had changed in Italy. The old squires had got poorer and poorer. A new race had sprung up. The capitalists had bought the small men out; the big estates had grown to vast size. Folks say that's what *we* are coming to. I express no opinion. I really know nothing about

the future, only a *very, very* little about the past. And no man should prophesy except he's sure. Prophecies have such a plaguy trick of disappointing the prophets and their friends!

Well! about 230 years after the death of old Cato, there was born, somewhere on Lake Como, a child who soon lost both his parents, and who was adopted by his wealthy uncle and is known by the name of the Younger Pliny. He grew up to become a very rich country gentleman with half a dozen country seats. He inherited his uncle's large estates and his uncle's taste for learning and literature. He, too, got a commission in the army first; but he soon retired, as we say, and then he became a barrister, and then he took to political life and became governor of the dependency of Pontus on the Black Sea, answering pretty closely to what is now called Trebizond, stretching from Samsoon to Batoum. But he was disgustingly rich; and it was not the time for much ambition except a war broke out; and there was not much of that now, except in that little island of Britain or among those poverty-stricken Dacians across the Danube. The Parthian war was coming, but it had not yet come. What could a Roman gentleman do but farm, and hunt, and take to literature, and make speeches, and write Greek plays and Latin epigrams, and build magnificent palaces and

lay out gardens, and collect pictures, and look after his tenantry; exactly as country gentlemen do now when they have the means, or will do when they get them?

And all this was exactly what Pliny did. But he was an incomparably more honoured and kind-hearted and polished gentleman than that rugged, boorish, blustering, boisterous old Cato. Cato behaved like a brute to his servants and dependents. Pliny was rather inclined to coddle them.

There was a certain Zosimus, a kind of private secretary or *factotum* of his, about whom he writes quite a pathetic letter to one of his friends. Zosimus seems to have been far gone in phthisis—he was spitting blood and coughing his lungs away. Pliny had sent him to Egypt—up the Nile, you observe—one winter; and the man returned a trifle better; but he could not stand the climate in the heights of the Appenines, and the old symptoms had returned. Pliny writes to his friend asking him to lend him a house he had in the south of France at Fréjus, about ten miles from Cannes. He was to lack for nothing, all his expenses should be paid. "Because," says Pliny, "I have heard that the climate is very genial and there is plenty of good milk to be had there, which is just what he wants to cure him."

In another letter he writes that he was much up-

set by the death of several of his household. "Some people," he says, "look upon losses of this kind only as so much money's worth gone from them. People who look at the matter only in that light may be anything else you please, but they are not *men*, whatever else they are."

Pliny had some magnificent gardens at one of his houses somewhere in Tuscany. He gives us a long and minute account of the house and its belongings. It was, he says, in a delightfully beautiful country and remarkably healthy. "People live," he says, "to an astonishing age. You may see old men whose great-grandchildren are almost grown up, and the old fellows' stories and talk, when you go to see them, almost make you fancy yourself carried back to a bygone age. . . . All along the verandah," he says, "there is a stretch of green sward [xystus] with a number of patterns cut in it and edged with box, and then there is a slope down to a raised belt of shrubs with shapes of animals facing one another cut out in box. Beyond this a broad walk, hedged with evergreens, more box clipped into strange shapes; and beyond this again a broad walk flanked by evergreens, planted close, and low-trimmed shrubs. . . . Then there is the riding-school, with cypresses planted round it; and then comes the garden where the roses grow; and fountains, and

seats, and marble columns, and the fantastically clipped box trees here and there and everywhere."

Verily a palace for a king, and in that climate an earthly paradise.

As one reads all about it, and gets bewildered in the reading, one begins to ask oneself whether Solomon had any dream of such magnificence as this in the houses that he built in Lebanon and other parts of Canaan in the old days.

But Pliny came out now and then as a sportsman, and among those Roman gentlemen pig-sticking took the place of our effeminate practice of pheasant-shooting. Falconry, as far as I know, was an amusement unknown to the Romans; but pig-sticking, with its considerable share of danger, and its requiring a great deal of nerve, coolness, quickness of eye, clever horsemanship and a steady hand, was really a fine manly sport, and the country gentlemen loved it inordinately. They preserved herds of wild boars very strictly and jealously, just as the King of Saxony does now; and they had their *battues* as the same king has to this day. There is a letter of Pliny to Tacitus the historian, in which the writer boasts of having taken three wild boars, and grand ones too, in a single day; and there is another which looks like Tacitus' answer to his friend, lamenting that in his part of the world there were no wild boars; so

there was nothing for it but to surrender oneself to literature and write poetry—if only one could! But think of Pliny and Tacitus going out pig-sticking together and watching at the nets for a rush, hunting-spear in hand!

Kindly, courteous, very generous and high-minded, Pliny was sure to be an enlightened and public-spirited landlord!

Twenty years or so ago, I ventured to print in a local paper a literal translation of one of Pliny's letters in which he gives a delightful account of his meeting his tenants at the usual rent audit, and of what followed.

One of the farmers came to the audit with his son, a boy to whom Pliny took a great liking. "Where do you go to school, boy?" said the great man. "Please, sir, at Milan!" "At Milan! What in the world do you go all the way there for?"[1] Then followed a discussion and a remonstrance which ended by Pliny's proposing to do exactly and precisely what the Endowed School Commissioners of this our enlightened 19th century set forth as the best and only satisfactory way of bringing the higher education to the doors of every small townsman in

[1] The same difficulty of finding good schools in this district was felt eight centuries later. See *Mon. Germ. Hist. Capitularia*, Tom. I., pars. ii., p. 327.

England, and which they have been trying to do ever since with very questionable success.

Pliny proposed that the Como people should all subscribe to set on foot a really good day-school at Como; get a good master, pay reasonably high fees, and keep their boys at home instead of sending them, at an absurd expense, to all the ends of the earth, where they would be sure to learn a good deal of mischief and pay dear for it too. "Do this," said Pliny, "and instead of your sending your money to be spent in other places, you'll find other people come to be taught in your school, and they'll bring money here instead of your sending yours away to enrich other folks. Do this, and I engage to add a third of whatever sum you subscribe among yourselves, and the more you call upon me to pay the better I shall be pleased."

When I sent this memorable letter to the local paper aforesaid, the learned editor told his readers that of course it was only a bit of my fun: and the readers all thought it was a hoax, and giggled and chuckled and said to one another, "What a droll man that is! It's a wonder how he can think of such things. He must be *very* clever." But one old gentlemen grunted out, "Clever! I don't call a man clever who's such a tremendous liar!"

Alas! my experience of life is a very sad and depress-

ing experience. When once or twice during my life I have taken it into my head *to invent* a story—and I really have no talent for that sort of work, more's the pity!—people have always exclaimed: "Oh! how very true and life-like—there is nothing half so charming as the naked truth." But as sure as I have told a plain, unvarnished tale, without one atom of exaggeration or dressing, so surely will a small chorus of critics cry out upon me for a romancer. "The man is *very* clever, they say, but he's a tremendous liar!"

I cannot dwell any more upon Pliny and his country life, but his letters are full of a pleasant breezy freshness and healthy enjoyment and kindliness and nobleness. *He* stop at Rome among the gossips and quidnuncs and all the frivolities and trivialities and fatiguing routs and dinner parties and committee meetings and inane palaver of the streets and clubs and the board-rooms? Not he! Writing from Laurentum one day to his friend Fundanus, he sums it all up in a nutshell. "You city people," he says, "you merely *waste* your time. I spend it profitably and rationally. You think you are very busy, and so you are; but you are busy at doing nothing; and my opinion is that it is better to have nothing to do than to do nothing!" A pregnant saying, paradoxical, but wise!

I must make another leap over another century or two in time, and, travelling again westward, settle myself down in France in the 5th century A.D.

The power of Rome had been waning for long; that awful force had crushed out all the institutions of old Europe which we most falsely stigmatise as merely barbaric. Rome had moulded the peoples to her will, and stampt her imperishable image upon nations and races till they seemed to be almost organically changed. The forms of Roman political, civil, and even religious life had been reproduced everywhere. They were delivered to the subject people as if by a Divine ordaining, at once a destiny and a boon whereby alone mankind could be regenerated. The city on the seven hills was the very embodiment of Almighty power and Divine wisdom. Its master was accepted as the God-man whose will was law for all the world. But times had changed, and though the old idolatrous awe for the emperor had scarcely waned, the executive had become almost contemptible. The god thundered, but the levin bolts fell harmless.

The Gaul of the 5th century had gradually been left more and more to manage its own affairs. There, too, local government had long been established, and Gaul from end to end exhibited now a faithful copy of the condition of society in Italy. In both lands

the same influences had long been at work. I am inclined to think that provincial life in Gaul was in a more healthy, or at any rate a more hopeful, state than Roman and Italian life. The old Gaulish language had almost ceased to be used in the towns. It had long ceased to be written. The old Gaulish religion had almost disappeared. The old Gaulish civilisation and education had made way for Roman habits, Roman dress, Roman literature, Roman everything. Exactly the same changes had taken place in the relations between the townsmen and the countrymen which had been going on in Italy, only more so. The townsmen were frivolous, gay, idle, extravagantly fond of the theatre and the circus, holding their bishops and clergy in great awe, a church-going people well drilled in religious matters, execrating their Arian neighbours with a fierce intolerance and hating them like poison. In Gaul, too—suppose we call it France for convenience, only don't tell some folks that I was guilty of the crime of talking of France in the 5th century—in this old France, the most enlightened and delightful province of the Roman Empire, the same changes had been going on for centuries which had been going on in Italy. The small men had been bought out by the rich men, and the land had fallen into the hands of the few. Or if that is overstating the case—and we

may very easily overstate it—there were some country gentlemen who had enormous landed estates and immense palaces, and who were living just the life that Pliny had lived three centuries before at Como or Laurentum.

We have abundant materials for enabling us to arrive at a very full knowledge of the way men lived then from the Garonne to the Mediterranean. The impression one derives from a careful examination of the large mass of literature of all kinds which dates from this period of Gaulish history, is that the France of the 5th century has very little to fear from a comparison with the France of the 19th century. Of course satirists ranted and raved as they always did do and will do. Pagan writers said the Christians were all ruffians and hypocrites; and Christian writers said the Pagans were all murderers, adulterers, and robbers. But when you come to read the letters of Sidonius Apollinaris, quite a refreshing picture of this old French life reveals itself to us on the right hand and on the left. Never was there more enthusiasm for literature. In fact, the besetting sin of the age was pedantry. One rich man, Protadius, set himself to collect an antiquarian library, intending to draw up a history of his native ancestry.

The great schools of Arles, Bordeaux, Toulouse, and Clermont swarmed with students attending

lectures on rhetoric, law, and mathematics. Rutilius, Symmachus, Ausonius, Salvian, Sidonius—all men whose works have come down to us, men who were poets, philosophers, rhetoricians, historians—were all born Frenchmen or, if you prefer it, Gauls. The ladies were not only great at embroidery, but were great readers too. Never a large house without its library.

Huge and luxurious as were the Italian villas of three centuries before this time, the Gaulish mansions were far grander and more magnificent. The imagination of the Arabian Nights sinks into mere childish storytelling when we come to compare the creations of the Romancers with the descriptions of the prodigious palaces owned by Sidonius and his friends.

Churches rose up everywhere as if by magic. Bishops were princes, and their influence was not only based upon their wealth, but upon the moral power which they exercised and the extraordinary awe that they inspired among the hordes of mutinous mercenaries who were for ever rebelling against their nominal masters, and at last took to living upon the helpless people whom Rome could no longer protect or govern. But for the country gentlemen of Gaul in the 5th century, they were living like the gods of Olympus—

"Propt on beds of amaranth and moly;"

while bands of Wisigoths and Burgundians and Goths, the mercenaries in Rome's pay who broke out in revolt, came pouring in, plundering and slaying. Sidonius describes, as Pliny had done before him, four or five of these vast country houses whither the Gaulish nobles and landlords retired when the disturbed state of the country made town life perilous and intolerable. But at the time we are dealing with they were monster edifices two or three times the size of Windsor Castle or Buckingham Palace. The most audacious romancer has never dared to describe so amazing an architectural prodigy as the villa of Pontius Leo overlooking Bordeaux. In mere sport and pride the builder of this vast place had surrounded it with high walls embattled and flanked with towers. For the time had come when it might very easily need to be turned into a veritable fortress; "and if it should come," says Sidonius, "it would take an army to besiege it." Even among the very ramparts there were magnificent baths. A mighty cascade at intervals sent down a foaming cataract over the roofs of the mansion and thence flowed on into an artifical lake, where at times there were boat-races and miniature sea-battles. In front of the baths was an arcade supported upon columns of the most splendid marble. The walls were panelled with richly carved precious wood, the ceiling was glittering with gilding.

The plan of the palace beyond was so contrived that there were suites of apartments from which the visitor might see the sun at all hours of the day. Everywhere there was a profusion of sculptures; some illustrating history, some merely fanciful. Galleries of pictures, many of which Sidonius describes; hydraulic machines distributed streams of water wherever it was needed; contrivances for heating every room and corridor turned winter into summer at will. Fountains spouting and babbling; great fish-ponds and grottoes; gardens and shrubberies and vineyards; tennis lawns and archery grounds; and for those who loved the chase, horses and hounds and hawks and falcons, for it seems they had learned the art of falconry since the days when Pliny knew nothing of that knightly craft.

But with all this luxury and culture and refinement and splendour it was a bad life that these great nobles were living—an enervating, corrupting life, selfish, aimless, and trivial. It was the life which the Virginian landlords were rapidly falling into when the great war came between the South and the North which for ever swept away from American soil the blighting curse of slavery and made the Western continent the land of the free. The Gaulish landlords kept their armies of slaves, and they suffered for their sin. They suffered in a hundred

ways, but chiefly in this, that their aristocracy became indeed a *bloated* aristocracy; and an effeminate indolence set in among all classes till patriotism died out and government became impossible; and if it had not been for what little influence the Christian religion and the Church exercised, there would have been mere riot and anarchy. But on all this I am not called upon to dwell.

Again centuries went by! The horrible and sanguinary atrocities of the French Revolution were the fierce expression of the wild resentment of a cruel populace against the country gentlemen of France. Historians are beginning to have grave doubts whether the French *noblesse* were anything like as bad as their plunderers and destroyers have been interested in describing them. But they had to go; just as our monasteries in the 16th century had to go.

There was no possible way of retaining the class of privileged landowners who were men of noble instincts and lofty natures, and zealous for all that was good, without leaving the tangled roots of a poisonous growth in the soil. A passionate impatience drove the multitude mad, and bad and good alike were swept from the face of the earth. It was done in the most savage and relentless way; and the mob screamed its fierce applause, and

worshipped the goddess of reason, and kissed the guillotine with bloated lips already red with blood. There were to be no more country gentlemen on the soil of France.

No more? I am old enough to remember, nearly fifty years ago, hearing an old French gentleman of the old school declaiming against the deplorable obliteration of all that was beautiful in his native land. There was no ceremonious courtesy, no more polished country life; no more grandeur in the provinces; no more of the quiet rural life that was worth living; no more cultured, enlightened, and elegant repose. "Monsieur," he cried, "les châteaux s'en vont!"—the country houses are all going.

So men have kept on repeating from year to year. And yet they have *not* gone. They are springing up everywhere again. The *old* style of country gentlemen has passed from the scene. The insolent profligates, heartless and rapacious bankrupts, out-at-elbows from their cradles to their graves—these have gone. They have been succeeded by a new race—rich, cultured, public-spirited men, alive to their duties and responsibilities, bringing to the land a great deal more than they get from it; slowly disseminating among the rustics new ideas, new hopes and the new culture, making many a deserted wilderness blossom as the rose. So it is among

ourselves. We Englishmen do our work without bloody revolutions—without guillotines, September massacres, or Nismes noyades. Only once in our history have we had experience of a violent cataclysm. We don't believe in the efficacy of explosions. We trust to the slow and silent working out of great laws in the body politic. We effect our revolutions gradually and do our work as we can, here a little and there a little, but always working on and forwards. We, too, have been getting rid of many a hundred country gentlemen who were doing no good to the country, nor their land doing any good to them. But others take the place of those that go and have served their time and can no longer hold on. Others come as wave follows wave in the great currents that ebb on for ever through the generations. The new men are the men of the new blood, and they and their posterity are going to have a trial. The wolves have gone. The wild boars have gone. The hares are almost gone. The deer and the foxes are going. Country life will be other than it has been; the many will rule, the few will obey. But as long as wealth goes on increasing, and brains and character—intellectual and moral force—have free scope, so long will there always be rich men who will buy country houses and lands, woods and parks, and fields and vineyards, and where they dwell there

must they needs be the blessing or the curse of their neighbours, whether they like it or not, and their influence and example will be now in the direction of progress, now in that of degradation. Their leisure or their activity, their virtues or their vices, will needs have their effect. Hodge may rail or envy, sneer or revile, howl or cringe, as the fit takes him; but divide this fatherland of ours into so many big towns, with their houses and their shops and their factories, their streets and squares and gas lamps, and so many million acres of mere arable or pasture land with no other inhabitants upon them but the mere tillers of the soil, turning over the clods, tending the cattle, and gathering the harvests, and this England would become the dullest, dreariest, and most repulsive island upon the face of the globe, and there would be no small danger of our posterity being compelled to cultivate the broad acres by convict labour only, for none but a felon would condescend to handle the spade or the plough.

VII.

LETTERS AND LETTER-WRITERS.

"Virginibus puerisque."

DURING the year ending the 31st of March, 1885, the sum of £7,898,000 was received for the transmission of letters through Her Majesty's Post Office. This means that during the year the number of letters, circulars, newspapers, and postal cards counted by hundreds of millions. We cannot, try as we may, realise what is meant by these prodigious numbers; they baffle the imagination; they stagger us as much as the conception of thousands, or even hundreds, staggers those savages of rudimentary brain who, we are told, cannot yet bring themselves to count above four consecutive units. But this we can understand, that the mere sum of intellectual effort involved in the composition of all

the vast assemblage of written and printed matter transmitted through the Post Office in a single year must be and is enormous.

We most of us think that there must be something wrong somewhere if the postman does not bring us something to read and something to answer by the time we present ourselves at the breakfast table in the morning, and very few of us of the middle class who have got out of our teens know what it is to pass a week without having to write a letter. Yet I often hear it said that the penny post and the halfpenny cards and the sixpenny telegrams are rapidly lessening the old habit of writing letters that are worth reading, and, in fact, that letter-writing is an art that is dying out.

I am one of those who do not believe in such a dreary prospect as the pessimists hold out to us; and if it be true that the machinery now employed in distributing our daily budgets is being largely utilised in sending huge numbers of circulars and advertisements all over the land, I can see no fear of any very great catastrophe ensuing. The rubbish basket is also an institution of our times, and its mission is not quite contemptible, in that it is the great eliminator which rids us of the draff and chaff and dross of our correspondence.

The gift of speech—articulate speech—is one of

the greatest of the gifts which differentiate us from the lower animals. Language is the prerogative of man, and the art of writing down his thoughts so that others may read them is the art which more than any other differentiates the civilised man from the savage. Nevertheless, it is only when a people has attained a high level of civilisation and culture that men and women begin to write familiar letters to one another. Literature begins in verse, for verse is the earliest of all composition, and only when men have passed out of the stage of metrical utterances and thence to the severer forms of prosaic narrative or formal legislative enactments, and the social fabric has attained to a certain condition of stability, and education has become diffused among the many and has ceased to be the privilege of the few—only then do people begin to address one another on matters of everyday life, and, being interested in the concerns of the present, find a pleasure in commenting upon the things *in being* and the things *in doing* that present themselves to their eyes.

The hankering for what we call sympathy is the virtue—or the vice—of advanced civilisation. I doubt whether primæval man cared much for what his neighbour was thinking about in the abstract. When we advance to the point where luxurious

leisure is possible, then first do we begin to communicate our sentiments one to the other. It is often an extremely annoying habit.

My cultured brother! are you condemned by the straitness of your circumstances to drive about the country in a vehicle called a waggonette? Then you *must* know what it is to have an exasperating fellow-creature of intense enthusiasm and excessive love of the picturesque appealing to you a dozen times in a mile to twist round your head like a Polly-pi-caw, and look at something behind you. "Oh, you *must* look!" is the cruel appeal of one who aches for sympathy and who has no sympathy for your aches! Strange that there should be in the human mind this absorbing desire to put somebody else in the same position that he or she occupies. Such attempts always fail, yet they will always be repeated in defiance of all experience to the contrary, and in total disregard of the law of nature, that a man cannot possibly be in two places at once. Is it that we are dimly conscious of the fact that the spiritual man will be independent of the limiting conditions of time and space, and that any device whereby we can help one another to approximate, even to the semblance of such independence, must be at once a move in the right direction, and a proof that we ourselves are rising in the scale of being.

Certainly the earliest letter that has come down to us—as far as I know—is an attempt to make all who read that letter feel at home in a great Egyptian city more than three thousand years age. Yes! At least fourteen hundred years before Christ, say the pundits. Think of that!

Centuries before there was a man or a thing called Homer—perhaps while Moses was trotting about in a wig and loin-cloth, and little Aaron was fishing in the Nile with a bit of string and a crooked pin—this letter was written, which all may read, by Panbesa to his correspondent Amenemapt. "I arrived at the city of Rameses," says this old-world gentleman, "and I have found it excellent, for nothing can compare with it in the Theban land." A very paradise for the vegetarian. Vines and fig trees, and leeks, and onions, and garlic, and nursery gardens—positively, nursery gardens. But, alack! they *drank*, these Egyptian people did—they drank the shameful, and Panbesa did not blush for them; he too smacked his lips—metaphorically—at the wine and the *beer* and the cider and the sherbet. He actually names them all, and he gives us clearly to understand that the place was "a pleasant place to live in," none the less because the drinks were various. And this before Israel had crossed the Jordan, while wolves were prowling among the seven

hills where Rome rose in the after time, eight centuries before Solon appeared as a legislator, and a whole millennium before Pericles was born or thought of! Yes, even then this Egyptian gentleman pronounces in a letter his opinion upon things in general, and goes out of his way to remark in it that there was a brisk trade in bitter beer imported all the way from Galilee.[1]

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It is observable how few letters we find in the Old Testament. When they occur they are for the most part letters written among people in a far higher condition of civilisation than the Israelites had attained to—*i.e.*, people among whom there was a more settled government, a greater knowledge of the world, and wider views than the children of Israel had any toleration for. It is to the West that we must turn, and to a literature that grew up long after the time of the older Jewish polity in Palestine, if we are to look for the earliest specimens of what we now understand by letter-writing.

So, too, it is significant that Greek literature is entirely wanting in anything that may be called a collection of letters. It is significant because, when we remember the kind of life which people led in Hellas, it is difficult to understand how they ever

[1] "Records of the Past," vol. vi. p. 11.

could have been a letter-writing people. They knew little or nothing of that affectionate intercourse between members of the same family which our word "home" stands for; the innocence of childhood, or even its loveliness, has hardly a place in Greek art; the companionship of brother and sister, or of mother and child, was hardly thought of. Where the moral sentiment is deficient, or so feeble as to exercise hardly any influence upon the conduct, people cannot be expected to keep up a friendly correspondence. It is to Rome and Roman literature that we must turn to find the earliest examples of affectionate and confidential letters passing between members of the same family, and between friends of the same tastes and sympathies.

It is when we come to the second century B.C. that we find the fashion of letter-writing has already become generally prevalent—that is, just when Rome's Empire had become widely extended, and when her citizens were always on the move, and sometimes absent from home for months or years, while in the meantime their hearts were ever turning towards the old scenes and the old friends whom they had left behind. As might have been expected, the earliest letters are those from parents to their children. Letters from Cato the Censor to his son seem to have been published soon after the old

man's death, and a considerable fragment of a letter from Cornelia to her son Gaius Gracchus is still extant, though some doubt its genuineness. Fifty years after Cornelia's death Cicero tells us he had read Cornelia's letters—that is, they were already common property, and already a recognised portion of Roman literature.

Of the early Roman letter-writers, Cicero himself was by far the most prolific and indefatigable. Born in 106 B.C., and murdered in 43 B.C., his life of sixty-three years was among the busiest lives that any Roman ever lived, but, like many another busy man, he always found time to write his letters. There are nearly eight hundred letters of Cicero now extant, besides at least ninety letters addressed to him; and we know that this large collection is a mere fragment of the immense correspondence that he left behind him. It extends over a period of less than twenty-five years—*i.e.*, it gives us on the average a letter for about every eleven days of the last twenty-five years of his life; the letters are written to all sorts of people, and are of all varieties of style. Only in a very few instances does the writer seem to have had any thought of their being published. Their charm is their naturalness, their frankness, their outspokenness. It is difficult to imagine what our notion of Roman life and manners,

of Roman history, would be without this unique correspondence; and all this astonishing letter-writing went on in the midst of every kind of engagement, and of such claims upon the writer's time and thoughts as few men that have ever lived are exposed to. Cicero was deeply immersed in politics, in lawsuits, in foreign affairs, in building houses, in writing books and making collections of art treasures, in travelling, in actual warfare; yet in the midst of it all he was writing letters, long and short, at a rate at which only a professional journalist nowadays could think of turning them off.

Sometimes pedantic and sometimes affected in his other writings, Cicero is never so in his letters. There he is always natural, and there you have the best side of the man shown us. The letters were written from his heart—I mean the familiar letters. He writes because he had a longing to communicate his thoughts to his friends—in other words, because he had a craving for the sympathy of those he loved. I believe that will be found to be the real secret of all good letter-writing. If a woman sits down to write as Madame de Sévigné did, or as Pope did, with a view to an outside public, and only half a thought for the friend or relative addressed, you will never get really *natural* letters. There will always be a false ring about them. More than one book

has been published during the last few years the author of which has been extremely careful to tell us in his preface that it was never intended for publication; that he was very much surprised indeed when it was urged upon him that he should actually print his letters! Nothing had been further from his intention. The letters were written in the first instance to X, or Y, or *Z*. Yet we can hardly read a page without feeling quite certain that X, or Y, or *Z* was only a peg to hang the letters on, which were most surely addressed to a larger outside public, whom the author never lost sight of from the moment he took his pen in hand till the moment he laid it down.

Cicero's letters are thoroughly genuine, and when they are meant to be read by the world at large the style is altogether different from that which he uses in the simple confidence of friendly intercourse. But there is one abominable practice which is extremely objectionable in these letters. Cicero is always putting in little scraps of Greek and Greek words—Greek slang, in fact. His letters swarm with them—exactly as some people now never seem to be able to get on without some scraps of French or German, which might just as well, or better, be expressed in homely English. There was some excuse for a Roman doing this in Cicero's days,

because the language was inadequate for the wants of a large-minded man then, and there were new ideas and new habits and new experiences for which the meagre Latin vocabulary of the time did not suffice; but there is no excuse for this kind of thing now. The habit of putting in tags and rags of French at every page is only one of those crafty devices whereby a person with a small vocabulary endeavours to conceal poverty of style. It is less a confession of weakness than a pretence on the part of the writer that he is master of a foreign language, which he can use with greater facility than he can his own mother tongue. That usually means that he is very imperfectly acquainted with *any* language, his mother tongue included.

There are two curious omissions in Cicero's letters, one to be very much applauded, the other very much to be deplored. The first is that Cicero never indulges in that most foolish practice of ordinary letter-writers, to wit, long descriptions of scenery—what people now call *word-painting*—a most silly and affected expression. Few things are more irritating than to receive a letter extending over three sheets, filled with descriptions of scenery. They are almost always very feeble, at best they are very tantalising, and they generally wind up with an abrupt notice that the writer has positively no time for more. Of

course not! You can't go on indefinitely using up superlatives and ringing the changes upon all the names of the colours in a paint-box. When I write a book of travels, I shall describe nothing I ever *saw* in the whole course of my journey—I shall only tell my readers what I *heard*. And a very interesting and exciting book will my travels be!

The other omission in Cicero's letters is really quite unpardonable. In all those eight hundred letters it would be difficult to find one in which he says a word about the dress of the ladies of his time—it is disgraceful, but so it is. It proves him to be like other male creatures—unobservant, tasteless, dark, obtuse, and lacking in that higher sense and that gentler, truer, elevating refinement which the nobler sex is gifted with. This omission in Cicero's correspondence is all the more reprehensible because his correspondents were by no means exclusively gentlemen. There was one lady, Cærellia, who, we are told, had a very voluminous correspondence with him. It is most unfortunate that Cærellia's letters are all lost. She *must* have told him how Fulvia and Terentia and Tullia and a host more were dressed, and how they looked. The result is that there are few subjects of which we know less than we do of ladies' dress at Rome in the later years of the Republic. We know that Cicero's own wife got him into great

difficulties by her speculations on the Stock Exchange or something of the sort, and that Cærellia herself was an extremely fine lady of great wealth and of very great culture. We know that Cicero frequently writes about his lady friends, though he was not exactly what is known as a lady's man; but about their toilet—their jewels—their fashion of doing their hair—their shawls and their feathers and their ribbons, and the last new things in caps or mantles—not a word! It is very sad! What a deplorable loss the world has experienced in the disappearance of the Lady Cærellia's letters. Is it not to be hoped that they may yet be discovered in some obscure library? How much happier we should all be!

When Julius Cæsar was murdered at Rome there was a young man pursuing his university education at Athens, and his name was—well, it does not much matter what his name was, but we call him *Horace*. I don't know whether he was a *great* and voluminous letter-writer, but I do know that he left us two books of what he calls letters, which have this great recommendation, that they are written in *verse*. It is a received axiom that a poet is born, not made; but a poet is one thing, and a versifier is quite another. Anybody who has only average ability can write *verse* if he tries; it is the very easiest accomplish-

ment that man or woman can acquire. But practice and care are needed for the manipulation of verse, and practice and care are not generally allowed to be essential in the production of letters worth reading. Therefore I do strongly recommend any young person afflicted with the dangerous gift of fluency in writing and liable to be run away with by a restless pen and an exuberant style—any one, *i.e.*, who, being still in the teens, is in a fair way to become intoxicated by the discovery of how much may be produced on paper under some circumstances and by some unfortunate people in twenty-four hours—I say, I do strongly recommend such persons to write, if it be only one or two long letters a week, in English verse. My gentle sisters of the nimble pens, my noble brothers who drive the goose-quill with such ready fingers; as a wholesome check upon excessive speed in the production of literature, do try writing your letters in verse. Did not Horace do so? Why should not you? Is it not a melancholy thought that all Horace's prose letters have perished? So may yours. Yes! But a good many of his verse letters have survived. Why not emulate Horace?

There is one more Roman letter-writer that I have a word to say about—I mean that coxcombical and self-conceited prig commonly known as the younger Pliny. Yes! he was really the *beau idéal* of a prig.

Very rich, very polite, very refined, very highly cultured, very choice in the society he mixed with, very punctilious, and very much impressed with the conviction that the world at large, and the Roman world in particular, had a great deal to be thankful for in the fact that he, Pliny, had been born when he was and been brought up as he had been.

He could not help being a prig. He was brought up a prig from his childhood. He wrote a Greek tragedy when he was fourteen. When he was a boy his uncle seriously expostulated with him once for taking a walk. It was such a waste of time. Once he writes to a friend that he had been out hunting—killed three boars too, and fine ones. Who had? That didn't matter! He, Caius Plinius Cæcilius Secundus—better give him his full name!—had sat by the nets—that was quite enough—sat with pen and notebook in hand, a wild boar or two grunting at him all the while and preparing for a charge on the earliest possible opportunity! Cool as a cucumber and improving the occasion, "I thought about a subject, and made my notes about it," says he. Like a young curate sermonising, in fact.

Once, when he had been invited to a dinner, he stipulates that he will come, provided the conversation shall abound in Socratic discourses. Once, when half promising a friend that he intends

to write him something worth reading, he checks himself with the horrible thought that he had no paper good enough, and there was a great doubt as to whether he could get any good enough to write on. "Think of the nasty coarse spongy stuff in these parts," he says. "Why, my dear friend, I should actually be sending you smudges —dreadful!" The most sublime instance of Pliny's priggishness is to be found in his letter to Tacitus, describing his own lofty and superior demeanour during the great eruption of Vesuvius. The angry volcano was all aflame — the earth was heaving like a troubled sea—the air was dark with smoke and ashes—his own uncle had been suffocated by the sulphurous fumes, and his mother burst into the room where this young puppy of seventeen was playing the stoic. Pliny says, "I called for a volume of Livy, and read it as though quite at my ease, and even made extracts from it as I had begun to do." Making extracts from Livy in an earthquake! What sort of letters could you expect from such a man?

And yet Pliny has left us some very delightful and amusing letters. Among them is the famous ghost story, which is perhaps the best specimen of his power of simple narrative. Here it is:—

"There was a certain mansion at Athens, large

and roomy, but of evil repute, and a plaguy sort of place. In the stillness of the night, lo! there used to sound the clank of iron, and as you listened there was a rattling of chains; at first a long way off, then coming nearer and nearer, till it came quite close. Presently a spectre appeared. An old, old man, lean and wan, with a long beard and shaggy hair, with fetters on his legs and manacles on his arms, and wringing his hands. The inmates of the house were very miserable. They would not live there. The place became deserted and given up to the dreadful phantom. At last a certain philosopher came to Athens, Athenodorus by name. He saw the advertisement, inquired the terms, asked why it was so cheap, learnt the full particulars, and gladly hired the mansion. Towards evening he ordered a sofa to be set for himself in the front of the house, and provided himself with pen and paper and a light. He sent away all the servants and set to work writing. For a while there was only dead silence. By and by—hark!—there was the sound of iron grating against iron, then the chains clanking. The philosopher never looked up nor stopped his writing. He kept his mind clear and his ears open. The noise increased; it drew nearer—it was at the threshold—it had come inside the door—it was unmistakable. He raised his eyes. There was the phantom

he had heard of staring at him. The ghost stood still and beckoned to him with its finger. Athenodorus waved his hand as much as to say, 'I'm engaged; you'll have to wait,' and he went on with his writing. The ghost rattled his chains over his head as he wrote. He looked up again—the ghost was still staring at him. He took up the light and followed. The ghost went very slowly, as if it felt the weight of its chains. It led the way to a back yard of the house, then vanished. Next day Athenodorus went to the magistrates and told them they must dig in the place where the ghost disappeared. There they found some human bones and fetters upon them. They were collected, buried at the public expense, and the house was rid of ghosts from that time forward!

"'Very odd!'" says Pliny. "'My dear friend, what is your private opinion upon this story?'"

I have ventured to give a translation of this letter, not only because it is the earliest detailed account of the appearance of a spectre with which I am acquainted, nor because it is a specimen of the kind of ghost story which is very commonly repeated when such stories are going the round, but because it is difficult to see how any such story could have been told except in a letter. There are some things for which familiar letters are peculiarly adapted. In

what other branch of literature could a man sit down seriously to tell a ghost story? He could hardly venture to introduce such a narrative into history; science would deride him, philosophy would frown at his levity, poetry would refuse to lend herself to his tale. But in a letter you may be as playful as you please, and then you may adapt yourself to your correspondent, who may be credulous or the reverse, but in any case you know he is not likely to take you *au grand sérieux*. In our letters we are not expected to write by rule and compasses. We are not afraid of too severe criticism. A letter is hardly expected to be a full-dress performance.

As far as I know, more than three hundred years had passed before any such collection of letters as that of Pliny was published, or at any rate attained to anything like very general popularity. At the close of the 4th century or beginning of the fifth, Q. Aurelius Symmachus thought proper to proclaim to the world that he considered himself the prince of letter-writers of his time, and the world—*i.e.*, the Roman world—was in such a dilapidated condition that it took Symmachus at his own valuation. For, like Pliny, Symmachus was very rich, had a grand house at Rome, and several beautiful villas in various parts of the world.

If I ever live to be rich I am not sure that I shall

publish a volume of my letters, but I don't know. Somehow rich people seem at all times to have delighted in letting mankind read their letters. Any poor creature can get his children to read his letters, long or short, but to get a whole generation of men and women to pore over your correspondence and applaud it—that seems to be grand! So Symmachus thought, and so his son thought, when he edited his father's epistles in ten books, I suppose because Pliny had published his in ten books. It is a dreary collection—"vapid as long decanted small beer," as one says—yet noticeable for one feature that in our time has become extremely well known to us.

Symmachus is the first who gives a specimen of the real genuine begging letter, and we have of this two examples. I am not going to translate them—partly because I am reluctant to facilitate matters for the begging impostors and give them a model from antiquity, partly because most of us have no need to go back to the past to find out the kind of epistles which the begging impostors send. This is a kind of literature familiarity with which has bred in most of us a certain measure of contempt. There is one letter which Symmachus wrote for a young friend of his, who very much wanted to make an offer of marriage to a young lady and wished to do

so in the best possible manner. Symmachus was equal to the occasion, and gave his friend a model. As to the letters of introduction in this collection, they are legion, and the letters of condolence and the letters of congratulation. But, as I said before, they are a dreary lot, and perhaps the only really curious and valuable epistles are those which have to do with the writer's bargains in horseflesh and the purchases he made of strange animals for his menagerie! As for his style, it has one merit and one only, it is fairly simple and fluent. If the man had written obscurely his rubbish would never have reached a second edition.

Note that if there is something *in* what a man says, the world will forgive a little awkwardness in the manner of saying it. But if there is nothing, then only that man's writings are read who can be understood at a glance. Miss—what *was* her name? —was wise in her generation. The lips that are always in the proper attitude for the pronounciation of "potatoes, pruins, and prism" are sure to be practised in the enunciation of elegant phrases; and a letter that offends nobody, and does not require to be read three times before you can catch its meaning, is much more likely to be read by thirty times three readers with pleasure than the other is to be read three times by one.

Just a generation after Symmachus (almost the last of the dandified pagans) joined the majority, he actually found an imitator in the person of Sidonius Apollinaris. At any rate, they say that Symmachus was his model. He certainly did not copy his model very closely as far as style goes, for a more villainous style than that of Sidonius in his letters one would not wish to find. Sidonius started in life as a politician, and at one time it seemed on the cards that he might actually become Emperor of Rome some day, for he married the daughter of the Emperor Flavius Avitus. Avitus had a short reign of barely a year, and then Sidonius found himself effaced. By and by he rose to the surface again, was employed as an ambassador from the Averni to the Emperor Anthemius, got into favour, and had a statue of himself set up in Rome. I dare say it is there now somewhere.

One day the Emperor said, "I'll make this man a bishop." Sidonius protested vehemently, by no means liking the prospect. But there was no help for it. In those days when an emperor took a thing into his head it had to be done. Sidonius became a bishop accordingly—Bishop of Clermont, and a very good and conscientious and zealous bishop he was—so good a bishop, in fact, that when he died he was proclaimed a saint; and there stands his name sure

enough, in the Roman Calendar on the 23rd of August as Saint Apollinaris.

I can hardly imagine a greater contrast than the letters of Symmachus and Sidonius. Symmachus's trashy epistles have been saved from absolute oblivion only by their flimsy transparent style, and the very triviality of their contents. The letters of Sidonius will always be read in spite of a style that is most repulsive, and at times appears studiously unintelligible. He is one of those objectionable writers whom a man reads because he can only get at his information by reading him; for really the matter in Sidonius is extremely valuable. Some paragraphs you can no more make out than you can crack a cocoanut with your teeth. These you must skip, and if you can find a translation happy are you.[1] Nevertheless, some of Sidonius's letters are charming. Thus the careful portrait of Theodoric, King of the Goths, in the first book, is one of the most elaborate miniatures that has ever been drawn in words. So too the delightful account Sidonius gives of a visit he had paid to a friend's house near Nimes, and the sketch he gives of the way in which a rich country gentleman kept up hospitality in the 5th century is invaluable. We talk about *our* luxurious

[1] See Germain, "Essai Littéraire et Historique sur Ap. Sid.," 1840; Chaix, "S. Sidonie Apoll et son Siècle," 2 vols. 1867.

way of living. Let a man read some of Sidonius's letters, and he will see that fourteen hundred years ago, down in the South of France, people had a rather exalted notion of grand and capacious amusement.[1] Indeed, the impression we get from these letters of the prodigality and luxury of the times is almost dreadful. There is one letter taken up with the description of the dresses and appearance of a young bridegroom's retinue on his wedding morning, and there are up and down the correspondence all sorts of odd hints and notes which only a letter-writer could have inserted.

But what is especially valuable in these epistles of Sidonius is the fact that in it we seem to be taking a farewell of heathendom, as it was concerned with the life of the upper classes in Roman society, and find ourselves moving now in a world that has, if not yet become Christianised, yet has become profoundly modified in its habits of thought, and even in its moral tone, by the influence of Christianity. Between the letters of Symmachus, the pagan gentleman, and those of Sidonius, the Christian bishop, one would expect to find a great gulf fixed. There is no gulf at all; Sidonius, the Christian gentleman, bridges it over, and by the time that Sidonius has taken his place as the bishop of his diocese, and begins to

[1] Lib. ii. 9.

write letters to other bishops and to the Pope and the clergy round him, we feel that we have stepped with him into the Christian world, and are not surprised to find that in this valuable correspondence we are brought face to face with that not always very edifying form of composition, to wit, religious letter-writing.

* * * * *

Here I am touching upon a branch of our subject which requires such very delicate handling that I feel I had better pass it by with a very few words. This, however, must be said, that religious letters were things unknown till the Gospel made its way in the world. Not till the tendency had been at work to a very dangerous extent whereby people were urged to aim at being Christians first and men and women afterwards—not till unanimity in opinion on matters of faith had become the idol which all professing Christians were taught to bow down to, and till a wave of fierce and intolerant asceticism had swept over the Christian world, and men and women had been taught the duty of self-examination and self-contemplation to an extent which made their own dreams and moods and emotional condition appear to them the only realities, and God's beautiful world appealing to them with its glories on every side was getting to seem the only dreamland—not

till then did people begin to write religious letters, detailing their own experiences, telling of their own or others' visions, or temptations, or ecstasies; and at the best occupied with discussions on the interpretation of sacred Scripture, or the writer's *views* on theology, the beatific vision, counsels of perfection, and those tempestuous emotional paroxysms which are called conflicts of the soul.

I am not at all sure that such letters as these when they abound (as they have abounded at times) indicate that religion is in a flourishing condition in the Church, or in a healthy condition for the individual. But with such letters I feel that it would be unwise to meddle now. The 4th century saw the beginning of what may be called religious letter-writing. The three largest collections of these letters are those of St. Augustine, St. Jerome, and St. Basil. St. Augustine's letters can really hardly be called letters at all; they are for the most part treatises on the interpretation of sacred Scripture, or on theological or philosophical questions. The human element, and even the *moral* element, is conspicuously absent. I can think of only a single instance in all this collection of 263 epistles which I could describe as a graceful or affecting letter; I mean that one in which the writer accepts the present of a tunic which a young lady had prayed him

as a special favour to wear. Sapidia—that was her name—had made the tunic for her brother with her own hand. Her brother had died—suddenly, we may infer: would Augustine wear the tunic as a memento of the dear lost one, as a token of regard and confidence from the sorrowing sister? Augustine writes that he was actually wearing the tunic at the moment that he was replying to the poor girl's letter.

In the letters of St. Jerome, which number one with another just 150, we have some valuable notices of the religious life of the time, and we get a most curious impression of the awfully high pressure at which devout people were living at the close of the 4th century. So far St. Jerome's letters are invaluable, but there is an unreality about them. I do not mean insincerity. The men and women are *not* men and women, but creatures who are trying to be something else, and who believe themselves to be something else. Jerome's letters are, with, I think, a single exception, eminently and glaringly unpractical. Jerome himself is up in a balloon, and he seems to assume that everybody else is, or ought to be, or wishes to be, or is trying to be, up in a balloon too. The single exception (which, however, you must take for what it is worth) is the letter to Læta, in which he gives advice on

the education of a young lady whose mother was very anxious to bring her up religiously. The rules are almost amusing. The girl is not to mince her words as the fashion is; she is not to paint; not to have her ears bored; not to dye her hair red; not to dine with her parents lest she should learn to be greedy; not to allow any young gentleman with curly hair to smile at her; she is to learn to spin, and she is by no means to learn dancing or fancy work.

I think we have met with this kind of advice in more modern times than St. Jerome's, but a letter like this is noteworthy because it helps to show us how there is really nothing new under the sun; and this, perhaps, is one of the most useful lessons which familiar letters read us—they hold the mirror not up to nature, but they hold it up to society, and remind us that the manners of one age are not so very different from those of another.

St. Basil's letters are very much less known than those of his two great contemporaries, but they are far more real, genuine, human, and interesting than those of Augustine and Jerome. Basil's letters have a wide range of subjects, and his correspondents were people of all ranks and classes and opinions—pagan philosophers and professors, governors of provinces, ladies in distress, rogues who had

tried to take him in, and of course a host of bishops and clergy. There are going on for four hundred of St. Basil's letters which have come down to us, and therefore they must have been very popular once. Certainly nobody reads them now. Yet as letters—as natural, graceful, gentlemanly letters—they are incomparably superior to those of Augustine or Jerome—*these* are always dreadfully grim. But Basil can laugh and can be playful—witness his letter to the Governor of Cappadocia, who had cured himself of an illness by dieting himself on pickled cabbage. "My dear sir," says Basil, "I am delighted at the news. I never believed in cabbage before, still less in pickled cabbage; but now I shall praise it as something superior to the lotus that Homer talks of—yea, not inferior to the very ambrosia that served as the food of the gods!" The Governor answered that letter very briefly, and his answer has been preserved. "My right rev. brother," says the Governor, "you are right, there's nothing like pickled cabbage! Twice to cabbage kills—so the saying has it: I find many times to cabbage cures. Come and try. Dine with me to-morrow on pickled cabbage—that and nothing more!" I think the Governor had the Bishop there. I suppose he felt compelled to go, but I can't be quite sure. Think of a saint solemnly dining on pickled cabbage!

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that after St. Basil's time, after St. Augustine's time, the art of writing letters in an easy, familiar, frank, and unconstrained way died out for more than a thousand years. I do not mean that no letters have come down to us; they swarm in mediæval literature; the 11th and 12th centuries are especially rich in *Epistles*, for that is a better name for the missives which the prominent personages of those centuries issued. But these epistles have all the appearance of being made by machinery. To begin with, they are almost always written by men in office, either in the State or the Church, by bishops or archdeacons, or kings or nobles, or abbots or priors. One never hears the prattle of a child, or the sob of the widow, or the laughter of a friend. The letter-writers never unbend. Even in St. Bernard's letters we hear little about common affairs. I remember one of them in which St. Bernard, being away from Clairvaux, and either at Rome or on his way to Rome, gets tidings that a certain landed proprietor in the neighbourhood had swooped down upon a herd of swine which belonged to St. Bernard and his monks. The letter is a short one, and it bluntly tells the offending marauder that on the receipt of this letter he shall straightway send back the pigs without an hour's delay. "If not," says St. Bernard, "I will

beyond a doubt excommunicate thee for thine evil doings." It was no light offence to drive off the pigs of a holy abbot! But the point is that the abbot was writing and not the man, and it is so, as far as I have observed, through all the correspondence of these ages. The people whose letters were thought worth preserving were all *personages*, they are players in the drama of their time, and they all have their stage dresses on—nay, they have all broken with anything like the family life and the sympathies and affections which flourish round the domestic hearth. The official life has swallowed up the personal.

If you ask how and why this was, I should be disposed to assign more than one cause for the phenomenon. But certainly the most powerful and most crushing influence which produced this effect was that which was furnished by the almost universal intolerance of anything that bordered on freedom of thought and freedom of speech during the long period to which I have referred. Do not commit the mistake of assuming that this intolerance was only in matters of theology. It was in everything. The bitterest and narrowest intolerance that ever was displayed was not greater in the domain of theology proper than in the domain of philosophy. Abelard was no ecclesiastic, and the

party strifes between Nominalists and Realists had only a remote bearing upon religious belief. When Vacarius, the greatest lawyer of the 12th century, began to lecture at Oxford, and was gathering crowds round him in his lecture-room, the king, Stephen, drove him away from England because he would have no new-fangled science of law. Heresy as late as the 14th century did not mean only theological heresy, it meant any novelty in physical science, politics, law, even art. For a thousand years people were afraid of expressing their real sentiments, they were afraid of one another, orthodoxy was the one thing needful, and any revolt from the tyranny of the dominant authorities was visited upon the rebel with no sparing hand. How could people write freely as friend to friend with a halter round their necks? It was not till the time of the Renaissance that men began to unbosom themselves again. In speaking thus I must be understood to speak with special reference to England and Englishmen, for the intellectual awakening of Italy in the 14th century had characteristics peculiar to itself, and the letters of Petrarch are wholly unlike anything which we have to produce in our literature of the same age.

But when the 15th century dawns, then we come upon what, I think, may fairly be called the incom-

parable collection which goes by the name of the Paston letters, and which, I think, stands quite alone in literature as an assemblage of the private letters addressed by members of a family of distinction to one another during a period of eighty-seven years, and which includes more than a thousand letters, the earliest of the date of 1422, the latest written in 1509. The minuteness of detail, the naturalness, the outspokenness of this correspondence, the way in which by its help we are plunged into the family life and social habits and political schemes and conflicts of this period of our history, are so wonderful and so thoroughly unreserved that an attempt was made about twenty years ago by the late Mr. Herman Merivale to show that they were and must be a forgery. The attempt was triumphantly scattered to the winds. Mr. Merivale was smitten hip and thigh, the original letters were actually produced, and are now deposited in the National Archives. We are not likely to hear any further doubts of their genuineness.

One of the arguments that Mr. Merivale brought forward to prove his point was that, on a comparison of these compositions with the published works of the time, and especially with what might be called the professional English of the bookmakers, the

Paston letters were incomparably more simple and *modern* in their language, incomparably more intelligible and readable than the books were. The fact is undeniable, and it is a very significant fact too. Familiar letters, if they are not lucid and unaffected in style, if they are pretentious and stilted, are worthless. Fine writing is bad enough anywhere; it is detestable in a letter. If a man is paid by the page for his writing, and has to live by it, we may pity him for his hard fate; and if he spins off his periods with a view to covering so much space in a given time, it is partly his fault and partly the fault of his unhappy circumstances; but if a man writes pages upon pages of commonplace in a bombastic and inflated style to a relation or a friend it is *all* his fault. He at any rate might have let it alone.

When we come to the 16th century we come to a very curious condition of affairs. As far as the *quantity* of letters is concerned, the 16th century has perhaps the largest assemblage of letters to produce of any period in English history. The letters and papers (for the most part letters in form) of the reign of Henry VIII., which have already been calendared, count by hundreds of thousands. The Cecil correspondence preserved at Hatfield, and which extends from the accession of Edward VI.

to the end of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, is a fathomless ocean of letters. We are told that during all those fifty years over which the Cecil correspondence extends scarcely a day goes by which does not produce one or more letters connected with passing events. The Cecil correspondence is said to contain upwards of 30,000 documents, only a portion of which is bound up in 210 huge volumes. Yet it is remarkable that in all this prodigious assemblage of letters which the 16th century could produce, the really hearty, friendly letters are rarities. The men are all dressed in buckram, the women are all playing a part; there is no free, unrestrained intercourse.

When James I. came to the throne English society seemed to recover from the constraint which had oppressed it so long, and then everybody began to write letters—their name is legion. Everybody regarded letter-writing as a graceful accomplishment by which he might hope to gain friends or improve his prospects, or even make money; it was like playing the violin. Who could tell whether a career might not be open to the professional? For the *newsletters* of the 17th century did the work of the newspapers now, and the quidnuncs of the time bought and sold the last piece of intelligence, which straightway was committed to paper and circulated sometimes widely, sometimes among the privileged

few. And this, too, produced its effect upon the familiar intercourse which was carried on by correspondence. The letter-writers were writing for an outside public, and how large that public might grow to be no one could say.

When the Commonwealth comes, and everybody is suspicious of his next-door neighbour, as he had been in the century before, it is noticeable that there is a great dearth of such letters as we should most desire to meet with—so great a dearth, indeed, that we are very imperfectly acquainted with the general tone of sentiment among even the middle and upper classes, and their real opinions and secret hopes and fears and wishes under the Protectorate. It is extremely significant that in those periods of our history, when Englishmen were most held down by the tyranny of their rulers, when their lives and liberties were most insecure, when the nation was cowering in the most abject panic—I mean under the terror of Henry VIII., under the oligarchy which ruled in the name of Edward VI., and under the iron heel of Cromwell—we have almost nothing that can be called familiar and friendly letters. In times of horror and fear and suspicion, and when no man can trust his neighbour or kinsman, men and women dare not put pen to paper; then the least said the soonest mended.

It is only when the reign of Queen Anne had come to an end that English letter-writing revived. Pope and Bolingbroke wrote for fame, Gray and Horace Walpole wrote for love. I think only one man that ever put pen to paper has surpassed Horace Walpole as a letter-writer. Gray and he were at Cambridge together, and through life they were always friends and correspondents. It is impossible now to do much more than mention the names of these accomplished men. Gray's own letters are very finished compositions—not because he laboured at them, they never smell of the lamp; I should be surprised to hear that he had ever re-written a letter in his life—but Gray had all the fastidiousness and precision of style which come of severe scholarly training and correct scholarly taste, and it is conceivable that if his education had been other than it was, he might have proved only an ordinary correspondent. I sometimes think that if Cowper had been sent to the University, instead of to an attorney's office, he might have been, and would have been, more like Gray than any one else. But Horace Walpole would have been Horace Walpole whatever his training had been. His letters came from him by a spontaneity that can never be attained. He was born a writer of letters, and if he had been shut up in a desert island like

Robinson Crusoe he would have written letters all the same, and kept them till some ship arrived which should carry them to their destination. The good-humour, the gaiety, the delicate satire, the exquisitely felicitous turns of expression, the sly hits here and the shrewd comments there, the inimitable way in which he tells a story, the absence of that scowling detraction and venomous spite which make some of Pope's letters so distasteful—all this, and a great deal more make those nine volumes of Horace Walpole's correspondence the delightful treasure-house they are. I never take down a volume of Horace Walpole's letters without reading more than I intended, without thinking and sometimes saying to myself, Why will people write any more books? Surely we have enough already!

I have ventured to say that one letter-writer has surpassed even Horace Walpole, but I feel inclined to withdraw my words. Could any one surpass him? Well, if any one could or did, that one was Charles Lamb. And if he did, it was because in Walpole's large correspondence there is sometimes silver mixed with the gold, and sometimes the writer's heart is not quite free from guile, nor his hands always clean. But Charles Lamb's letters are all gold, all pure gold. When he dipped his pen in the inkhorn all the gall evaporated. That unique

genius seemed to be unassailable by the baser passions and meaner motives which trouble common men; that gentle spirit did not seem to know what the feeling of jealousy or hatred or spite or envy meant. Only once that I remember was he known to be angry, but then more grievously hurt and troubled than wroth. It was when Southey had quite unintentionally laid bare an old and dreadful wound.

No man can be the worse for reading Walpole's letters, but any man or woman or boy or girl will be the better—yes, very greatly the better—for reading Charles Lamb's letters, every word of them!

Take the following specimen. It is one of that incomparable collection of letters addressed to his friend Manning, and I give it as an instance of the same kind of literary composition of which I have already instanced the ghost story in Pliny's correspondence, when I said that only in a letter could such a story be told; for as there are some subjects which are best dealt with by a poet, and some by a mathematician, and some by an historian, and some by a philosopher, so there are some which only admit of being handled by a letter-writer who has no higher aim than to delight or amuse or interest his friend, and to carry on a genial and light-hearted talk with him on paper when he can no longer talk with him by word of mouth. His aim is to provoke

him to laughter or playful retort, to engage with him in a game of skill and repartee, when neither side desires to be too sombre, where both are playing for love, and each is the merrier for all the surprises and tricks and passages with the foils that occur as the game goes on. Take, I say, the following as a specimen :—

"DEAR MANNING, . . . I wish you had made London in your way. There is an exhibition quite uncommon in Europe, which could not have escaped *your genius*—a live rattlesnake, ten feet in length, and the thickness of a big leg. I went to see it last night by candlelight. We were ushered into a room very little bigger than ours at Pentonville. A man and woman and four boys live in this room, joint tenants with nine snakes, most of them such as no remedy has been discovered for their bite. We walked into the middle, which is formed by a half-moon of wired boxes, all mansions of *snakes*—whip-snakes, thunder-snakes, pig-nose snakes, American vipers, and *this monster*. He lies curled up in folds ; and immediately a stranger enters (for he is used to the family, and sees them play at cards) he set up a rattle like a watchman's in London, or near as loud, and reared up a head from the midst of these folds like a toad, and shook his head, and showed every

sign a snake can show of irritation. I had the foolish curiosity to strike the wire with my finger, and the devil flew at me with his toad-mouth wide open: the inside of his mouth is quite white. I had got my finger away, nor could he well have bit me with his big mouth, which would have been certain death in five minutes. But it frightened me so much that I did not recover my voice for a minute's space. I forgot, in my fear, that he was secured. You would have forgot too, for 'tis incredible how such a monster can be confined in small gauzy-looking wires. I dreamed of snakes in the night. I wish to heaven you could see it. He absolutely swelled with passion to the bigness of a large thigh. I could not retreat without infringing on another box, and just behind a little devil, not an inch from my back, had got his nose out, with some difficulty and pain, quite through the bars! He was soon taught better manners. All the snakes were curious, and objects of terror; but this monster, like Aaron's serpent, swallowed up the impression of the rest. He opened his cursed mouth, when he made at me, as wide as his head was broad. I hallooed out quite loud, and felt pains all over my body with the fright.

"Yours sincerely,

"PHILO-SNAKE, C.L."

I have been told that when I was a child Charles Lamb patted me on the head. (Surely the hair will never cease to grow on that particular spot!) But what a reserve of joy he would have bestowed upon me if he had ever written me a letter! A man with a letter of Charles Lamb's in his breast-coat pocket addressed to his very self would be as rich as one who owns a genuine Hobbema.

* * * * *

We have come to our own time at last, after skimming on the surface of the centuries. We have got back to the Postmaster-General from whom we started. Bless the good man and all that belong to him! We could not do without him now, and we owe him more than we know. But is it true that with the increase of quantity there is coming a deterioration in the quality of our letters? Never believe it! First-rate quality in any commodity—material or mental, moral or spiritual—is not to be had for the asking. But pleasant, cheery, happy letters, such letters as—like the quality of mercy—are twice blest; courteous, graceful letters, such as win young people friends, and go far to keep such friends in good humour; hearty, affectionate letters, such as strike the chords of love and awaken mysterious tremors in response; letters that tend to keep us at our best and protect us from sinking

down to our worst—these any one may write who is not too indolent to take trouble and not possessed by the delusion that accomplishments come by nature as spots do upon the leopard's hide.

VIII.

A SUGGESTION FOR MY BETTERS.

A CRY has gone forth from across the Channel that the masses in France are getting heartily tired of reading novels. The booksellers in Paris are, so they tell me, alarmed at the outlook: they say that the everlasting *feuilletons* in the daily papers supply—more than supply—all the demand that remains for fiction; that people will not buy the story-tellers' books; that the appetite of the million for romance has become jaded—jaded by satiety. So far from being surprised at this, I can only wonder that the craving for French fiction has lasted so long. Two or three years ago, when I asked M. Taine how it was that people seemed to have forgotten Emile Souvestre, and instanced that wonderful story of his, "Le Gardien du vieux Phare," as a work of consummate art which deserved to live for ever, the great

critic snubbed me with courteous superciliousness. "Souvestre! *Ah, bien!* A sort of Miss Edgeworth. He had his little day. *Voilà tout!*" Of course I collapsed, but inwardly rebelled: and I said to myself, savagely—"No, it's not all! Some men have their little day—and their resurrection afterwards. How many of the soulless ones that are the idols of the soulless ones now will rise to newness of life in the future? How long will their reputation last?" When a man is snubbed he finds a wonderful comfort in prophesying bad things in store for somebody else, and ever since I got my snub I have been asserting loudly that French novels could not much longer serve as the pabulum for a brilliant people. I set myself to watch the signs of the times. Now it seems that I have not been very far wrong. France, I am told, is asking for more wholesome intellectual food than its spicy, cloying, sickly half-crown novels. Fiction, they complain, is unsatisfying. "*Bon-bons* are sweet, but they too often disagree with us. Better to have the solid nutriment of fact. Suppose we take a course of history." There are reasons for this change in the popular taste which, if I am rightly informed, has been coming over the French people. Apart from the corrupting and vicious tone of the later novelists—against which it was absolutely certain that there

would come a revolt sooner or later—there have been other influences at work. A school of historians has arisen—whose glorious leader and inspirer was the late M. Fustel de Coulanges—from whom quite startling and novel suggestions have emanated during the last twenty years or so, and by whom a new appeal has been made to the patriotism of French students. These men have, above all things, set themselves to prove that not even in historic research does France owe anything to Germany. Forty years ago the theory of Von Maurer, which claimed to trace the origin of property in land from prehistoric times, when organised communities held the soil by what may be called a social tenure, had been very widely accepted by students of history. M. de Coulanges, then a young man, had serious doubts about the soundness of the hypothesis, and set himself to examine the evidence on which it was based. With astonishing patience and labour he gave himself to the minute study of all that vast body of recondite lore which, directly or indirectly, had any bearing upon the questions at issue, and, undaunted by the vastness of the task he had set himself, nor discouraged by the smallness of his class at the Sorbonne, he pursued his researches with heroic tenacity of purpose till the time came for him to speak. At last, in 1885, he put forth his first and most notable

volume, under the title of "Recherches sur quelques problemes d'histoire."[1]

In his preface to this volume he says: "It is now twenty-five years since I began to teach, and each year I have had the happiness of having *four or five pupils*. . . . The one truth of which I have persistently endeavoured to convince them is that history is the most difficult of the sciences. What I have taught them before all things has been *to inquire*." The young men caught their master's enthusiasm, and, under his guidance, and stimulated by his heroic surrender of himself to the search after truth, a new school of historical research has risen up in France, and his labours and theirs have begun to bear fruit. It has dawned upon the new generation of intelligent Frenchmen that all this talk about a German immigration—a colonisation—a settlement of a whole people, with their wives and children, upon French soil in the 5th century, whereby all the institutions of the invaded lands were moulded according to the pattern of things beyond the Rhine, is a mere German figment—a specimen of German brag and bluster. A magician's wand has touched the pyramid

[1] See "The Origin of Property in Land." By Fustel de Coulanges. Translated by Margaret Ashley, with an Introductory Chapter by Professor Ashley, of Toronto. Swan Sonennschein & Co., 1891.

of theory and tumbled it over—proved, in fact, that its only foundation was its apex. M. Fustel de Coulanges has blown the theory of *the Mark* into the air. The national sentiment of loyalty to a champion who has stood forward to fight the scholar's battle of France against Germany, and has smitten the host of German dogmatists hip and thigh, has awakened a response. France will now turn her thoughts to historic research and laugh her enemies to scorn. Whatever Frenchman do in any department of literature they do better than any one else. We may be sure that we shall hear much of the new French school of history before many years go by.

But how are things looking with us on our side of the Channel? We too have our great Oxford School of History. For forty years or so Oxford has sent forth man after man magnificently trained in the discipline of historic research. The splendid quality of the work produced has been hardly less conspicuous than the wide area which has been explored. The monumental histories of the Bishop of Oxford, Professor Freeman, the late J. R. Green, and a host of others which it is invidious to omit, and yet impossible to include in any but an exhaustive catalogue, have changed the whole character of our views of English history. Men have begun to look

out for the steady evolution of our national life from primitive institutions, and to trace the operation of great laws in the events which used to be regarded as the only facts worth noticing in the records of the past. The wide range of discussion, together with the conspicuous learning and ability of the writers—which the pages of the *Historic Review* exhibit in its successive numbers — indicates how catholic our Oxford historians are in their views of the Science of History, and how wide the fields which they set themselves to explore. Moreover, it is noticeable that there is a remunerative sale even for the most severe works on history. The Bishop of Oxford's "Constitutional History" can no more be regarded as a popular work—*virginibus puerisque*—than Newton's "Principia"; yet edition after edition of the master's book is steadily absorbed. Professor Freeman's great "History of the Norman Conquest" is no drug upon the hands of the booksellers. Mr. Bryce's "Holy Roman Empire" has been reprinted half a dozen times. The "Corpus Poeticum Boreale" of Messrs. Vigfusson and York-Powell, I am told, is "going off," and there is hardly a county antiquarian society or a provincial record society that is not doing something more than paying its way. One would have thought that, in the face of these and other facts pointing in the same direction, we should

be able to assure ourselves that the knowledge of history — at least, of English history — would be becoming very widely diffused among the masses, and that, in return for all the immense sums that are being spent on elementary education, the people at large would by this time have attained to some intelligent familiarity with the glorious annals of their fatherland. So far from it, it may safely be asserted that there is not a civilised community upon earth whose people are so ignorant of their history as our English people are of theirs.

The most splendid distinctions in the academic arena at Cambridge can be attained by men who need not—and often do not—know whether Charles I. or Charles II. had his head cut off, or whether Queen Elizabeth was the mother, wife, sister, daughter, or second cousin of Henry VIII. Pass the question round the hundreds of bright and studious young men in the great hospitals of London, "What happened in 1066?" and every man of them will proudly give the triumphant answer. But proceed to ask them whether the Spanish Armada came to grief in the 16th or 17th century, or whether Clive was a statesman, a painter, or a British admiral, and the future *medicos* would be wise if they asked for twenty-four hours before replying to such a conundrum. It is all very well to

cry out, "Then they ought to be ashamed of themselves!" Why ought they to be ashamed of themselves? We are a very practical people—at any rate, we say we are—and how will the knowledge that Oliver Cromwell was a different person from Thomas Cromwell help a young surgeon to cut off a man's toe?

The cry is for useful knowledge, and from the category of useful knowledge we must exclude religion, morals, and history. County Councils are losing their heads over technical education; the masses must no longer be left in ignorance of the philosophy of kitchen economy—the composition of soaps, the mysteries of the wash-tub, and the theory of patent mangles. Agricultural chemistry—that awful science, so awful that nobody seems quite to know what it means—is to be a compulsory subject in our Board schools in a year or two, and urchins of fourteen will rise to the edge of transcendentalism in the rapt contemplation of bichlorides and superphosphates. In the meantime agricultural labourers, puffed up—not built up—by all this inflation of vapoury bubble-blowing, are to be handed over to the dominion of fluent rhetoricians, appealing to their passions, their selfish greed, and to just the worst side of their characters. We are leaving them absolutely defenceless against the assaults of dema-

gogues who live by sowing the seeds of hatred, discontent, and unhappiness, they themselves looking to reap the crop, such as it is likely to be. The poor fellows are losing all sentiment of patriotism. How can they retain it when they know nothing of the past—nothing of the lessons of history—nothing of the growth of institutions which have slowly developed out of their primal germs, scarcely recognisable in the ages of barbarism—nothing of the stubborn struggles for freedom of speech and freedom of opinion in which their fathers played the heroes' part, and paid the heroes' price for victory at last, in the shape of suffering and sacrifice? England's history is the grand heritage of Englishmen, and when we keep from the masses all knowledge of that, we are robbing the people of their birthright.

How long is it to go on?

I am strongly persuaded that even among ourselves there is growing up a hunger for bread rather than for ashes. It is quite pathetic to receive, as some of us are receiving, week after week, letters from intelligent correspondents of all classes begging to be informed upon the most elementary questions, which we had assumed that everybody was familiar with. Men are beginning to look into the history of their parishes or neighbour-

hood. Others are asking whether it is really true that their churches are more than three hundred years old; whether the Danes really did sail up to Norwich; or whether the Pope came to Swaffham, but found the place too hot for him. Others again want to be told all about the old weavers, and how the open fields answered, or why they have to pay two shillings a year to the Steward of the Manor Court, and, above all, and most frequently, how it came about that some parsons are vicars and some are rectors, and sometimes the tithes are paid to a woman or an alien. Meanwhile nothing has brought home to my mind more forcibly the conviction that very, very few educated, or half-educated, men have ever had the most rudimentary training in English history than the fact that I myself have got to be regarded us a real historian. They might just as truly call me an orator, and my bitterest enemies have never accused me of that. It makes me exceedingly uncomfortable to underlie this suspicion. I only know one clergyman in England—I do not count the bishops—who can be called a real historian, with a masterly grasp of English history from the days of "pot-bellied Saxondom" to the days of George IV. I will not name him—it might hurt him to be branded as a learned man and a scholar. But that a smatterer and fumbler, who is a mere groper

after a little knowledge of the past, should be looked upon as an authority in the "most difficult of all the sciences," proves how bad the outlook is and how grievously we want teachers for our rising generation. And yet, if the demand for such teachers is growing, surely there ought not to be much difficulty in providing the supply! All this grand historic literature which has been absorbed among us during the last thirty years *must* have been assimilated by students who are able and willing to reproduce it, if nothing more—probably able to do something better, by giving us the results of their own independent researches.

Are our County Councils debarred from using any of their money in the disseminating of a knowledge of economic history? I had written *political* history too, but I put my pen through the word, alarmed at my own audacity. For who would tolerate the proposal that we should teach the elements of political philosophy, or aspire to indoctrinate the masses with rudimentary notions about the duties and privileges of good citizenship? I need not say that I tremble to suggest that to be conversant with the leading truths of constitutional history will hurt no one, though such matters to the agitators are Nehushtan.

For some years past I have, in a bungling, blundering way, been lecturing on what I call historical

and antiquarian subjects to very different audiences in various parts of East Anglia. I can have no doubt at all that the interest awakened in these matters has very greatly increased — very greatly indeed — and that, among the working classes especially, it is rapidly increasing still.

One Sunday afternoon a year or two ago, when the service came to an end in the usual way, my congregation were met at the doors by a deluge of rain which fairly beat them. They crowded round the doors, hung back huddling, then some retired to their seats, waiting for the storm to spend itself. In the excitement of preaching, I had been quite unobservant of the violence of the wind and the rain. When I had retired to the vestry, and was about to make the best of my way to the parsonage close by, I began to understand the situation. "My good friends," I said, "you've had enough of preaching. Let me tell you something about our church." It was quite clear before I had gone on ten minutes that my audience were all alive and all awake.

Next winter I announced a lecture in the church on the history of the building *as far as the Rood Screen*. Kind friends came round me, drew out plans, furnished illustrations, and gave all that sort of kind help which lightens a man's heart and lightens his labour when he has a big task before

him. When the appointed evening came the building was full from end to end. Ill-natured defamers assert that I went on for an hour and a half; but that is a libel. Be it as it may, I am told not a soul went to sleep, and flatterers declared they found the dulcet tones and the romantic story all too short. I walked about among the crowds with a long stick. "Do you see that bulge in the wall? That means so and so. Do you notice that mark there? Well, once upon a time . . . John Styles, do you know whose tombstone you are standing on? That poor gentleman left £10 to . . ." And so we went on: not at random, however, but systematically, and ending—ending observe, not beginning—at the days when the first English Prayer Book was brought into the church and the Book of Homilies—which, to my shame, I forgot to bring in—was set up and read at the desk somewhere. Again and again have I been begged to continue my lecture, and to give, indeed, a long course of lectures on the history of the parish too. But life is short, and art is long, and flesh is weak. But I think it will not be long before the wish of my people will be in part complied with, and I have no fear of their being wanting in intelligent curiosity.

I venture to ask, Why should not this kind of thing be done in a hundred churches of any given

area? Why should not the powers that be encourage the masses in town and country to look back upon the nation's past and the people's past? Why should not duly qualified lecturers be sent out among our villages to stimulate the historic imagination, and to awaken interest in the struggle and the march of progress of generations gone by? Why should not English history, or at least some portion of English history, be made a *compulsory* subject in all standards above the third? Why should not School Boards and school managers do their best to roll away the reproach that we deserve should be brought against us?

Even "happy Japan" has its staff of itinerant lecturers, who go through the length and breadth of the land teaching Japanese history to the young men and maidens of the streets and the lanes; but we in England let year after year go by and generation after generation rise and pass, while to the enormous majority of our countrymen the glorious record of our ancestors' doings and strivings, and progress and upward-climbing, and spending themselves in the long crusade against tyranny and slavery and ignorance and intolerance, remains as if it were a record buried in the depths of some unfathomable cavern, where darkness reigns and none approach to decipher the forgotten scroll.

Assuredly there is no lack of learning and capacity for the work that requires to be done. Oxford could find abundance of men only too eager to engage in it. If Cambridge is as yet very far behind her sister University, there, too, there is an awakening and much promise for the future. The danger would be of young academics on the look-out for employment offering themselves, and being accepted, only and solely on the strength of their names being found high up in the class lists; but it should be remembered that, though these furnish us with a very trustworthy index to a man's power of acquisition, they tell us little more about him. They say nothing about his faculty of imparting knowledge, of his ability to interest young or old, of his capacity to deal with those peculiar difficulties and questionings which are for ever recurring when young people need this or that statement or problem to be put before them in different lights, or to be presented from different points of view. Such gifts and graces as these need to be tested by some other ordeal than that which our University examinations, as at present conducted, afford. It is because we have no such ordeal that we hear everywhere of "shocking bad teachers" and "miserable lecturers," and even of "wretched examiners." How should it be otherwise when there is absolutely no such

systematic training of University men, as there is for the elementary schoolmasters, in the difficult art of teaching—an art which no more comes by nature than the art of playing the violin does.

Moreover, if we are to send forth a body of instructors whose duty it should be to disseminate an intelligent and helpful knowledge of English history among our people, the teachers should not be left to follow each his own devices, nor allowed to choose each his own course of instruction, without some sort of direction and control. If they are to start as accredited public servants, they will have to be subject to discipline and required to give an account of themselves and their doings to headquarters, as everybody else is expected to do who is a stipendiary of any public body. The random vapouring of itinerant neophytes, dispensing small doses of Ruskin and water here and dilutions of Mr. Addington Symonds there, sometimes offering scraps of Egyptology and sometimes dogmatising pertly on art or economics to mystified but ecstatic audiences —all this will die a natural death; and not a day too soon. All young men and maidens, all more thoughtful and promising boys and girls, will grow up with something like a solid foundation of historic knowledge, will go on to learn the significance of great events and great movements, and to trace the

working-out of great laws and great principles in the ages behind us. The life of the present, the hopes of the future, will no longer be dissociated from the life and the conflicts of the past.

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